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ABSTRACT

The reasons why Australians choose to enroll in vocational education and training (VET) programs were examined through a questionnaire survey and site visits. The questionnaire yielded responses from 1,501 VET students of a target sample of 3,000 students who were equally representative of the following fields of study: business, engineering, health and community welfare, and tourism and hospitality. The site visits covered a representative sample of 11 public and private VET institutions and included interviews with institute management, department heads and teachers, counselors, and students. Some representative employers were also interviewed. Work experience or employment proved far more influential than any other factor in learners' choice of a VET program, followed in order by parental or guardian influence, performance in school subjects, advertising booklets or handbooks, personal experience of study at a college or university, personal friends, and employers. (Nineteen tables and 81 references are included. The following items are among those appended: sampling plan; list of groups sampled; background information statistics; tables detailing respondents' employment and educational histories, factor analysis of reasons for selecting the VET course; information about the sites visited; interview schedule for the site visits; and lists of employers interviewed and participants.) (MN)

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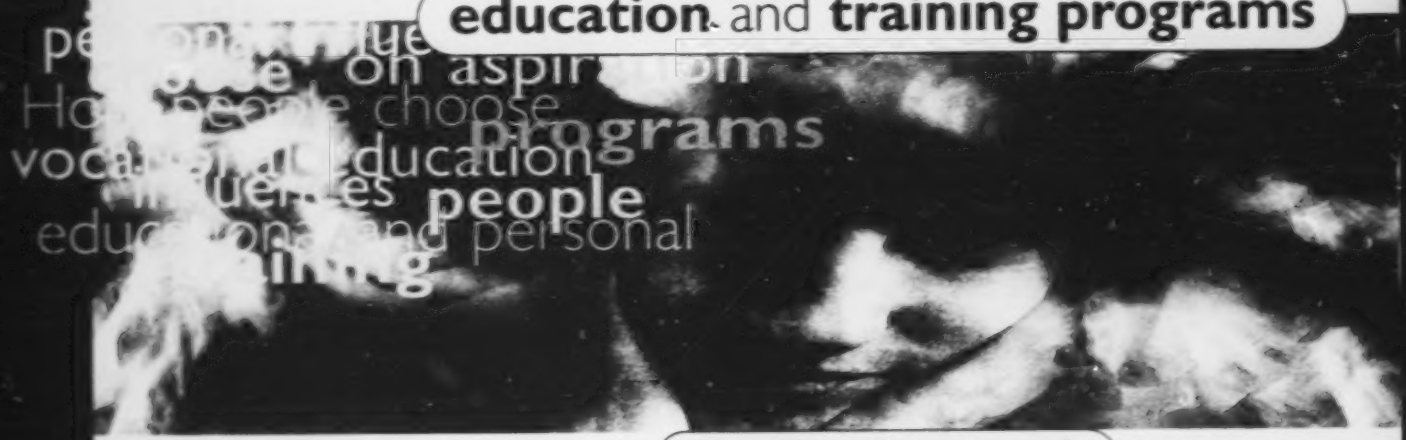

Social, educational and personal influences on aspiration

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NCVER

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Preface

This research was conducted by the Assessment and Evaluation Research Unit in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Queensland (Project Director, Dr Graham Maxwell; Senior Research Assistants, Maureen Cooper and Neville Biggs). It was a defined project of national significance of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) in its 1998 round of grants. Negotiations over the specifics of the research design delayed the start of the project until October of that year—by which time it was too late for data collection in that year. Negotiations with vocational education and training (VET) institutions relating to participation in the student survey took place between November 1998 and March 1999. The student survey was conducted between February and April 1999, shortly after students had begun their course of study, a substantial advantage since the actual reasons for enrolling were expected to be fresh in their minds and not yet forgotten by the passage of time or altered by an overlay of new experiences.

Access to institutions for site visits was negotiated between April and July 1999 and the site visits were conducted in July and August of that year. Analysis of the data was conducted mainly in the latter part of 1999. Interim reports were presented in February and November of 1999. The final report was concluded in April 2000.

The research team wishes to thank all of the participants in the project. First, we thank the institution directors who gave permission for the conduct of the student survey in their institution. Not all of the approached institution directors were willing to accept intrusion into the activities of their institution that participation in the project was likely to involve, especially as we indicated that some might be approached for site visits after the survey. We are, therefore, especially grateful to those directors who saw the value in such participation. Their support was crucial to the success of the project. Second, we thank the teachers who agreed to co-ordinate the survey within each participating institution. Their support was essential to ensuring that the questionnaires were distributed to the appropriate classes and subsequently returned to the project office. Third, we thank the teachers of the classes who responded to the survey, for the time lost in their teaching program and any inconvenience that application of the questionnaire to their class may have caused. Fourth, we thank the students themselves who answered the questionnaire and in many cases offered detailed written comments on the reasons for their enrolment in a VET program as well as on other aspects of their life. Their willingness to answer the questionnaire was crucial to success of the survey and provided important insights on how students make their choices concerning enrolment in VET.

We also wish to thank the institutions whose directors agreed to participation in the site visits. These site visits were critical to the success of the project and provide a rich source of information and insights on the issues surrounding student enrolment in VET. The visits were, without exception, helpful and interesting. In most cases, the

discussions resembled professional exchanges on the issues rather than one-sided interviews. In all cases, these discussions were entered into enthusiastically and energetically. We would have preferred these discussions to have been longer. Nevertheless, it is remarkable how much valuable information can be obtained from short but focussed discussions. Often, too, we were extended remarkable hospitality which we hope we repaid by stimulating new thinking about the issues raised. We thank the various participants in the site visits for their useful contributions: the directors, assistant directors and other institute managers; the heads of departments and their teachers; the publicity and information officers; the guidance officers and counsellors; the various student groups (often bemused by the intrusion of an outsider into their classroom, but usually willing to say their piece); and the employers (who gave up valuable time to discuss their relationship with the institute and how they supported its training programs).

The project team also thanks the NCVER for the support it provided over the life of the project, first through Hugh Guthrie and later through Jennifer Gibb. Also helpful was the feedback received from anonymous reviewers of the interim reports, helping to strengthen the conclusions and the final report. We thank these reviewers for their assistance.

Ultimately, however, the interpretations of the information obtained from the various sources are ours. We hope we have done justice to the complexity of the issues involved.

Executive summary

Design

This project investigated the reasons why people choose to enrol in vocational education and training (VET) programs. There were three components to the study: an analysis of existing research reports and publications; a questionnaire survey of a national sample of students in VET programs; and site visits to selected VET institutions for in-depth discussions with personnel and students.

The analysis of existing research and publications guided the identification of issues for the questionnaire and the site interviews. This study verified some of the existing research findings and extended the discussion of pertinent issues. Previous studies covered students in schools and universities, whereas this study focussed on post-secondary students in VET.

The questionnaire survey yielded responses from 1501 VET students from a target sample of 3000 students equally representative of four fields of study: business; engineering; health and community welfare; and tourism and hospitality. For each field of study, the target and response samples were proportionately representative of the VET enrolment across the five States, location (urban or country), provider type (public or private), program level (certificate 1, certificate 2, certificate 3, certificate 4 and diploma), and enrolment mode (full-time or part-time). The survey can be accepted as providing valid data on student opinions.

The site visits involved 11 institutions covering both public and private providers across the three eastern States, with balanced representation of the four fields of study as well as institutional types, regions and contexts. The target groups for interviews were: institute management; department heads and teachers; information officers and counsellors; and students. Some representative employers were also included. The data from these site visits can be accepted as providing good coverage of issues concerning student choice of VET.

Findings

It was found that work experience or employment is substantially influential for more people than any other factor in their choice of VET program, followed in order by parental or guardian influence, performance in school subjects, advertising booklets or handbooks, personal experience of study at college or university, personal friends and employers. However, no factor has better than slight influence for more than about one-third of enrolments. There is no overwhelming single influence for everyone, rather a combination of influences, each contributory but not conclusive in itself. The central message is that choice of course of study is a personal decision linked to basic

human aspirations and that it is important to recognise, understand and satisfy those aspirations.

Factors influencing choice of a particular VET institution, rather than some other institution, are: its course offerings; convenience factors such as proximity to home and course timetable; program affordability; opportunity for practical experiences; quality factors such as reputation of the institution and its qualifications; and institutional ambience, especially whether it is friendly and caring.

Three different types of reasons for enrolling in VET were discovered (in order of prevalence): to obtain a job; to realise personal aspirations; and to acquire or upgrade skills for current employment. It would appear that immediate employer requirements are of very low importance in the overall training market and previously have been given too much attention in national policy. Employers determine directly only about one-tenth of VET enrolments. Most enrolments involve people seeking a job or a better job or broadening their skills for future job possibilities in a changing job market. Employment opportunities in the field of study therefore rate highly as a reason for choice of program, although personal interest can be more important for some. Perceptions that the field of study also suits their personality and interests also play a role. However, people tend to be poorly informed about VET and unaware of their course options and pathways and need much better information and guidance to assist their making better choices.

Conclusions and recommendations

For a changing job market, personal and societal needs are served best by training which develops flexibility, allowing for a range of options and better preparedness for an uncertain future. This has been described as training for 'anticipated' labour market transactions in contrast to 'completed' labour market transactions as in the case of apprentices and trainees who are training as part of their employment. Anticipation of this kind is to be encouraged. Students can make more rapid and sensitive adjustments to the needs of the market through enlightened self-interest than is likely by either governments or employers, provided that training providers have similar flexibility of response. Future-oriented training requires greater emphasis on generic competencies, transferable skills, flexibility and adaptability, enquiry and problem-solving skills and capacity to continue learning. Training programs must adapt quickly to this demand.

Flexibility

There is therefore a need to remove or lessen inflexibilities in the training market, to recognise the primary agency of student interests and needs, to put more emphasis on long-term future-oriented training needs, to recognise the broader role played by training institutions in assisting personal development, to provide more extensive and more pertinent opportunities for experiences and understandings of work, to link these opportunities to long-term, systematic, school-based programs of career guidance, and to establish stronger relationships and innovative programs linking schools and training institutions. These initiatives would revitalise VET. They would also contribute to an improvement in its status.

Status

Currently, VET has low status. Deliberate attempts need to be made to raise its status. More positive images of the value of vocational training qualifications and of the jobs to which they lead need to be generated. Better information strategies need to be devised to raise awareness of different and changing forms of employment opportunities and their training needs. School teachers need to be co-opted as ambassadors for VET so that they promote positive attitudes towards choice of VET and encourage more sensitive matching of personal interests and capabilities and training opportunities and challenges.

Of course, positive images must be honest to be successful. The VET sector has to prove itself to be relevant, worthwhile and engaging. It must demonstrate that its programs lead to rewarding work opportunities. However, scenarios of work opportunities can be constructed that go beyond immediate employment to suggest pathways to personal advancement within business and industry. Such scenarios need to counter the self-destructive notion that the only pathway to personal fulfilment, status and wealth in the society is through university degree studies. Other visions of opportunities need to be constructed emphasising multiple avenues to personal advancement, expanding the horizons of those in training so that they can aspire to more distant possibilities in their future. Raising the status of VET in this way will require a concerted effort of research and development. Resources need to be devoted to this urgently.

Training providers

Diversity among training providers should continue to be encouraged. Diversity allows the value and quality of different approaches to be tested in a competitive environment where the choices made by individual enrollees ultimately favour those programs that are seen to be of highest value and greatest quality. The encouragement of diversity also supports a culture of deliberate attention to individual student need, especially involving attention to future study and work opportunities. It is also recommended that all institutions develop deliberate policies and strategies for teacher involvement in the promotion of their programs, contacts with schools and contacts with employers.

Information dissemination strategies

Information dissemination and advertising needs to involve a mix of strategies. Personal outreach is most important. It is recommended that VET providers be encouraged to develop innovative ways of providing students, both before and during training, with experiences of work situations and with understandings of the expectations of employers. In addition, making wise decisions about training options requires high-level personal decision-making skills, including skills in obtaining and systematising information on providers and courses as well as skills in considering the match to personal needs, interests, capabilities and aspirations. New strategies are also needed for career guidance in schools and training institutions, involving long-term development of vocational understandings, decision-making strategies and strategic

visions of the future. A national program of research and development on this is urgently needed.

Career development for students

The evidence of this study is that students in VET programs are generally limited in their vision of where their training program may lead apart from an immediate anticipated job. Some see obtaining that job as more important than completion of the training program. Giving students a vision of future possibilities is not the same as making sure they are well informed about their training options and not the same as equipping them with decision-making strategies. Helping students to develop a vision of their future is about extending their horizons beyond the end of their training program. This needs to be a third component of career development along with acquiring information on training options and developing decision-making strategies. As with the other two components of career development, this needs to infuse the whole of their education and training experience. It is not something that can be left to be dealt with at the end of the training period, as they enter the work force, but must be developed over time.

1 Introduction

Focus

The aim of this project was to investigate how participants in VET programs currently make their choice of program and the extent to which their choice is influenced by real or perceived industry and occupational opportunities or other factors. The changing nature of work and the need for the ongoing skills maintenance and skills development mean that VET is now an important component of success in today's workplaces for both employers and employees. VET clients need information and guidance to help them make informed choices about their training options. A systematic study of the ways in which people enter VET programs was needed to clarify the nature of choices being made and the reasons for those choices being exercised.

The main research questions were:

- What are the main factors which shape the consciousness and determine the choices of those who enrolled in a VET course?
- To what degree does enrolment in VET courses precede or follow employment?
- To what extent do students form a view of what they would like to do and then tailor their job-searching and/or VET-seeking to particular categories of industry?
- Is there a relationship between the quality and accessibility of VET information and the extent to which trainees feel they have made informed choices, are satisfied with their choices and have positive self-images in relation to that choice?
- What are the policy implications for national and State authorities, industry bodies and VET providers?

Design

Review of existing information

A review of existing literature was conducted focussing on studies conducted since 1990. The review began with a search of all Australian public databases, including AEI (Australian Education Index), ABN (Australian Bibliographic Network), NCVER (National Centre for Vocational Education Research) and DETYA (Department of Training and Youth Affairs), for all publications on research relating to reasons for program choice, information sources, job awareness, expectations of training

programs, self-image, personal motivation and career aims and also relating to enrolment trends, training profiles and labour market projections. Unpublished reports were also sought by writing to VET providers, both technical and further education (TAFE) and private.

Survey of participants in VET programs

A national survey of participants in VET programs was conducted, covering those enrolled in the first year of certificate/advanced certificate and diploma/advanced diploma courses in both full-time and part-time enrolment and with both public and private providers. The focus on enrollees in the first year of these courses was to ensure the greatest possible recency from beginning the course, allowing retrospective recollection of the process which shaped their current perceptions and motivations to be captured with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

The survey was national in that it covered all mainland States across the four fields of study with the largest number of enrolments. These fields of study were:

- business
- engineering
- health and community welfare
- tourism and hospitality

The target sample consisted of 3000 trainees; that is, approximately 750 per field of study, distributed proportionately across the five States according to the relevant VET enrolment. Intact classes of around 15 students were chosen according to a system of stratification by level, State, location, provider type (public or private) and whether enrolment was part-time or full-time (see appendix 1). Note that Tasmania and the two Territories were not included because they would have yielded sub-samples too small to be of practical significance.

Site visits of selected institutions

Site visits were made to a range of providers from the three eastern States, chosen from the capital city, large regional cities and rural towns. Usually one day was spent on each site visit. Interviews and focus group discussions were held with the following people and groups:

- senior administrators
- teachers/trainers
- publicity officers, recruitment officers, guidance officers and counsellors
- students

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion, using the designated questions as prompts but varying the wording and the order according to the flow of discussion. Although initial permission to enter the institutions for discussions was difficult to obtain, the discussions took place with enthusiasm. There were instances of staff attending the institution on a rostered day off so they could participate in the interviews. The interviews were audiotaped for subsequent review.

After each visit, key issues were discussed among members of the research team and were related to similar or different issues emerging from previous site visits in a process of grounded theory development. Themes emerging from these discussions provided a starting point for the later, more systematic analysis of the interview data. Transcripts of the audiotapes were used as the basis for further analysis and the identification of relevant themes.

From this analysis, various similar and different viewpoints were identified across institutions. Generally, similar viewpoints were expressed on wider policy issues initiated by governments, such as the training reform agenda. Institutions differed in their relationships with local and wider communities, their relationships with schools, and the perception of their roles in relation to different client groups. Personnel in different roles within institutions had different perspectives on some issues.

Timelines

The research was conducted between October 1988 and March 2000. The survey was conducted in April 1999 and most of the site visits were undertaken in July and August 1999.

Structure

The literature review is reported in chapter 2 and comprehensively examines previous studies and analyses of the political, economic, social and educational contexts of VET choice. Earlier studies examined the influences on student choice of VET, sources of information about VET and reasons for choosing VET. They informed the current project regarding the issues to be considered in the survey and site visits.

The survey findings are reported in chapter 3. Three types of items were used: personal background information; forced choice items; and open-ended comments. The structure of the sample actively sought data from mature-age students as well as school leavers. Preliminary analysis of the survey data assisted the selection of the institutions for site visits and the questions used in the interviews.

Findings from the site visits are reported in chapter 4. Although the interview schedules were prepared beforehand, based on the experience of the literature review and the survey, the site visit interviews provided opportunity for the interviewees to raise issues of their own. Furthermore, the interviewers could follow a particular thread of discussion in greater detail or pursue it into new material.

The literature review, the survey and the site visits provide three perspectives on the issues of VET choice. Chapter 5 offers a synthesis of these three perspectives as a triangulation of the issues using the main research questions as a focus. Finally, in chapter 6 the findings are translated into general conclusions and recommendations. This study provides useful new insights as well as confirmation of a number of previous studies on social, educational and personal factors influencing people's aspirations for VET and should contribute to the development of more sensitive policies for the promotion of VET and more appropriately targetted information and counselling. This cannot be underrated in the current employment context and changes in the Australian economy.

Note

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 present the basic data of the study and are therefore quite detailed. It may be that on first reading these chapters should be skimmed or skipped. A synthesis of the findings is located in chapter 5; conclusions and recommendations in chapter 6. After considering these final two chapters (in either order), chapters 2, 3 and 4 may be consulted for further detail.

2 Literature review

Locating and analysing source documents

A search of library databases was conducted to locate reports and other documents relevant to the study. Additional reports were located on a number of websites, including those of the NCVER and the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA). Printed copies of reports and documents were obtained from the NCVER library and other libraries, or directly from the relevant websites.

In December 1998, a request was made of 66 TAFE institutes and 12 large private providers for reports they may have compiled relating to reasons for student choice of courses, marketing of courses, analyses of information sources, enrolment trends, expectations of training programs, training profiles and labour market projections. Ten institutions, all of them TAFE institutes, responded to this request but the majority could not identify any research within their institute relating to reasons for student choice of course. Some institutes referred to the *Annual TAFE national graduate destination survey* for the reasons graduates had chosen courses. Only two TAFE institutes provided information about reasons for student selection of courses within their institute, which they had obtained from student satisfaction surveys.

Analysis of these source documents led to the following thematic headings which form the basis of this chapter:

- current contexts for decisions about participation in VET
- factors influencing choices about participation in VET
- public perception of TAFE
- reasons for choosing VET
- barriers to participation in learning
- private providers and their position in the training market

Current contexts for decisions about participation in VET

Individuals make their choices about further education and training within a political, cultural, educational and personal context. In this section, the political, cultural and educational context in which individuals find themselves today is described in relation to the current provision of VET.

VET in Australia during the 1990s has focussed on meeting the long-term objectives of the economy by being seen as the means to improve skills in the workforce and hence improve the competitiveness of Australia in a globalised economy. VET has become vital to securing the government's economic goals and governments have become increasingly prescriptive in their administration of VET. Toms et al. (1998) describe the notion of human capital, economic rationalism and corporate managerialism as 'the conceptual and structural framework for economising VET in Australia' (p.7). Vocational provision has been constructed to service mainly the industry sector and the Federal Government has been committed to 'developing an ongoing partnership between the training system and industry, under industry leadership' with the goal of training products and training providers meeting industry needs (Kemp 1997, p. 2). Reforms have focussed on two key objectives: making training more flexible and responsive to employer needs and making training opportunities easier for young people to access.

Competitive pressures have forced enterprises to implement training programs in response to workplace change. This has taken the form of workplace restructuring, an emphasis on quality improvement, and the introduction of new technologies. These changes have been the drivers of training programs which have been instituted to enhance the successful introduction of these new practices (ABS 1997b; Smith A 1998). Similarly in the UK, the drivers of training have been primarily the introduction of new technology and product and quality concerns rather than the concept of the learning organisation acting as a trigger for training practice (Raper et al. 1997).

Reacting to the strong industry focus of VET training, Harmsworth (1996) and Pickersgill (1998) have warned that VET must not only provide skills for industry but also ensure the provision of generic skills so that individuals can achieve a flexibility which will allow them mobility in the workforce and a range of options. Kinsman (1998) sums this up by saying, 'we need to redefine the "end user" of an individual's training not as industry but as the individual's own enhanced functioning in a higher order labour market' (p. 132). This is in contrast to most employers' motivation for training, which is to invest mainly in enterprise-specific skills, whereas a futures orientation is increasingly becoming a motivator of individual investment in training (Kinsman 1998). Wolf (1996) reports similar findings in the UK. Young people setting out to secure employment will choose training which will develop generic skills to maximise job opportunities while adults will want to develop a mix of skills: that is, generic skills, industry/occupation-specific skills and specific skills for the future. Barratt-Pugh (1998), based on the UK experience, warns that a focus on the speedy acquisition of industry-related skills will be at the expense of the learning skills of reflection and inquiry. It is the development of these learning skills that will be valuable to both employer and employee in the future as they operate in a changing world.

At the school level, consultations with all interested stakeholders in the future of education in Queensland State schools reported similar ideals (EQ 1999). While preparation for work is a fundamental purpose of education, this preparation should involve developing learning skills for a working life. For example, the current focus of vocational education in Queensland secondary schools is based on developing

occupationally specific vocational skills, whereas the development of skills in preparation for the social and work opportunities of the future could be more beneficial.

Wolf (1996) advocates that society must bear the cost of ensuring that both future-minded generic skills and industry/occupation-specific skills are developed in order to meet the demands of the future. In the Australian context, Woolley (1996) sees the challenge for TAFE educators being the establishment of a voice which will influence decision-making about the future education and training needs of Australians in order to balance the perspectives of industry representatives. In a study of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, Coopers and Lybrand (1996) claim a general benefit accrues to the community from a more educated workforce in the form of greater social cohesion, enhanced environmental awareness, improved health and an improved quality of life for individuals. Their report states that such benefits are important and must be considered when governments make investment decisions about training. Chapman (1998) refers to these social benefits as the 'externalities' from formal education and extends the benefits to include more informed public debate and more sophisticated voting behaviour.

The VET reform agenda has seen the development of a training market which claims to offer better service and outcomes for clients at a lower price. While there are some perceived advantages of the user-choice system, such as increased flexibility in programs and delivery methods and improved customer service from providers, there are issues of concern regarding the quality and assessment practices adopted in some of the training provided (Smith L 1999). In a study of apprentices and trainees, Noble et al. (1998) identified a possible tension between apprentices and trainees and employers. Apprentices and trainees wanted portability of credentials and pathways for career development and further training, whereas employers often chose the most cost-effective training provision, which could be at the expense of quality of training. Selby Smith et al. (1997) also warn that, with employers having a large say in how training is provided, training may become focussed on the short-term needs of enterprises.

Critics of the training market (Anderson 1997a; Golding & Volkoff 1998; Peoples 1996) contradict the view that it will offer a better service to clients because the goals of access and equity for clients do not exist in practice. Although defined as one of the two key client groups in VET, students feel their needs and priorities have not been considered in the reform agenda and there has been little impact on the quality of their learning experiences. Students are enrolling to attain vocational skills and qualifications, but their expectations of VET programs are not restricted to achieving job-related skills (Anderson 1998; Golding & Volkoff 1998). Market access for the financially disadvantaged is restricted and those with limited finances tend to be in labour market programs, or the lower cost adult and community education (ACE) sector (Golding & Volkoff 1998). Access is also inequitable for the unemployed, where VET is accessed through user-choice funding restricted to contracted employment (Noble et al. 1998).

Meeting the skill needs of industry is an important objective of VET but users are also individuals and communities (Selby Smith 1997). Regional and local VET needs are

not supported by a centralised market approach that does not consider social cohesion and community development (Billett et al. 1997). Fisher (1993) stressed the need for consumer groups in addition to industry groups to be considered in the implementation of a national training market and for social objectives such as lifelong learning, and post-secondary education in rural areas to be considered in addition to the priorities expressed by industry. Billett et al. (1997) refer to mutualities of interests among individuals, enterprises, communities/regions and industry as leading to a mature VET system rather than a competitive environment which favours some groups over others.

Factors influencing choices about participation in VET

VET clients need information to help them make informed choices about their training options, but Anderson (1997a) found that limited attention has been given to developing mechanisms for information generation and dissemination. So how do VET clients make informed choices?

Cornford (1994) considered the interrelationship between work and social class values, and the role of parents, peers, teachers, careers advisers, employers and governments in influencing career choices and attitudes to work. Schueler and Cavallaro (1995) looked at the impact of geography on TAFE participation and a West Australian study compared parental influence with school influence in relation to the vocational decisions made by rural students (Stevens & Mason 1994).

Studies frequently supported by government agencies are designed to determine the effectiveness of TAFE in regard to marketing and course provision and to discover the public perception of TAFE. For this reason influences on student choice are often recorded in the literature. Hannan et al. (1995) in a study for the National Board of Employment, Education and Training listed the incidence of influences on secondary student choice of decision for further study as: parents 57%; careers adviser, school counsellor 35%; school subjects 28%; peers 27%; work experience 26%; teachers, lecturers 25%; boyfriend, girlfriend, partner 19%; and Commonwealth Employment Service staff 15%. Dimitriou (1997a, 1997b) in a survey of students and parents of students in Years 10–12 in Tasmania concerning their perceptions and awareness of further education, found that the main sources of information for students were teachers and friends, while for parents the main sources of information were relatives and friends as well as brochures, handbooks and newspapers. Parents' recall of TAFE advertising was high, particularly in newspapers. Another Tasmanian study (Albert 1997) which explored how students learned about TAFE found that direct visits to VET institutions were the most informative sources of information for students. A national study commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) (ANOP Research Services 1994) found that students' main sources of information about university and TAFE were from school careers advisors, and university and TAFE sources. A less recent study by Chapman and Smallwood (1992) of secondary school students, principals and counsellors found that students had only vague impressions of the options available in VET (more

specifically, TAFE) and that their main source of information was word-of-mouth. These studies were mainly limited to school students and their parents.

Studies overseas, while not equating directly with those in Australia in relation to TAFE, in some instances confirm the influential role of parents. Tregaskis et al. (1993), who collected information on secondary school pupils' perceptions of entering the hotel and catering industry in Britain, found that family was a primary source of information but work experience and workplace visits were the most preferred sources of career information. In the USA, Hossler and Maple (1991) confirm the influence of parents on students' post-secondary plans and Lankard (1995) reports on the influence of family background and family attitudes about school and work on young people's career goals and aspirations. However, a recent British study (Rudd & Evans 1998) found that young people did not identify their family as having a major influence in determining their pathways into further education or the workforce, although their peers could be influential in providing options for further education. Rather, when choices were made, peers and family then provided support and encouragement regarding choices that individuals had made.

A study by Dwyer, Harwood and Tyler (1998) revealed that young people were frustrated by the expectations that they should be able to make 'life' decisions at the end of their schooling and they were critical of the advice, or lack of advice, given them by school careers advisors. Anderson (1997b) reports that the features of support services in TAFE which students value are: accessible hours; information about services; and competent student support staff. Students encountered problems in these three areas and were not being offered quality career development and employment advice.

Public perception of TAFE

Some studies have collected data on perceptions of TAFE. Chapman and Smallwood (1992) reported that TAFE was perceived as a pathway for further education and a step towards independence but also as a place for dropouts. These students had little awareness of diploma level studies. Teachers were inclined to view TAFE as a second-best alternative to university but admitted having inadequate knowledge of VET options. The more recent studies by Dimitriou (1997a, 1997b), mentioned earlier, seem to confirm that little may have changed in the intervening years and that teachers have inadequate understandings and appreciations of the VET sector and need more help in directing students towards VET. The DEET study (ANOP Research Services 1994) found that a higher status was attributed to university over TAFE and university degrees were perceived to provide the best opportunities for future employment. A West Australian study (Stanley & Reynolds 1994) and a study by James et al. (1999b) across three Australian States, both surveying final year secondary students, reported similar findings. The majority of students had a preference for attending university rather than vocational training, a preference found even amongst those unlikely to gain university entry. Stanley and Reynolds (1994) found that preference for institution was most importantly influenced by the course offered, followed by quality considerations, but final selections had to be made within the constraints of achievement levels. Dwyer, Harwood and Tyler (1998) report that

some students had to rethink their goals after receiving their official Year 12 results, and this sometimes meant enrolling in a TAFE course rather than a university course even though it was considered an inferior educational institution. This was a reluctant choice for one student but, 'I just felt relieved I got into something; I thought I had completely missed out' (p.35).

Recommendations for improving TAFE's image are made in a report by Deloitte, Touche and Tohmatsu (1997). In order to improve student perception of the value of TAFE training, TAFE needs to be presented as producing graduates who have qualifications which appeal to employers and qualifications which will lead to successful and rewarding careers. For employers, TAFE needs to develop a customer focus through personal contact, promote the quality of training it provides and demonstrate the relevance of courses in the contemporary world. TAFE institutes also need to develop relationships with teachers in schools in catchment areas.

Research of a somewhat different kind was conducted by Waugh (1994). This was a study of job and educational aspirations with data collected from 1182 Year 8 (13 years old) to Year 11 (16 years old) students in Western Australia. Most students aspired to education to Year 12 and beyond. For many this was viewed as necessary to gain qualifications for the job market rather than considered as ideally desirable. It was concluded that media campaigns and career education in schools would seem to have registered with students and to be having the effect of increasing their educational aspirations. One consequence, however, was that students tended to aim in unrealistic numbers for studies and careers in the traditional professions. Although aspirations became more realistic with age, VET was seen to offer a less preferable option. Whether VET is eventually seen as a positive choice was not within the scope of Waugh's study.

In a study for TAFE Queensland, Maxwell and Andrews (1994) reported on the 'cascade' effects of tertiary selection where TAFE studies were available alongside university studies. While the availability of TAFE diploma courses within a unified tertiary selection system raised the profile and status of TAFE diplomas, school leavers were inclined to aim for the tertiary course within their realm of interest with the highest cutoff that they could exceed. Typically, this meant that TAFE courses were not their first preference because of their lower cutoffs. As part of this study, a survey of beginning students in full-time TAFE associate diplomas and diplomas revealed that about half of such students were using their course as a stepping stone into another more preferred tertiary course, typically university studies (Maxwell & Andrews 1994). This raises many questions about the image and purpose of such diploma programs.

Reasons for choosing VET

The reasons students choose VET will be influenced by how they perceive the role of VET and the purpose this form of education and training has for them. In a national survey of senior secondary students conducted for DEET (ANOP Research Services 1994), the reasons given for planning to attend TAFE were: a TAFE qualification was needed for a desired career or job (49%); to improve job prospects (21%); for further

education (14%); TAFE interest in a particular course (11%); to attain recognised qualifications (6%); can gain entry to TAFE but cannot get into university (4%). Smith, E (1998) found that apprenticeships and traineeships were valued by young people and their parents for learning a trade as apprentices, or as a stepping stone to further work and training in the case of traineeships.

Wooden (1998) suggests that the lack of full-time employment opportunities for young people has directly contributed to educational participation both at school and in VET. Part-time work for many young people is casual or temporary, it pays poorly and is insecure. It offers few opportunities for formal training and denies access to career paths and the training opportunities available to people in the permanent workforce (Sweet 1998). Golding and Volkoff (1998), in a study of groups of VET students, found there was no clear transition between initial training and work but more commonly, individuals experienced periods of employment, further VET, unemployment, part-time work and underemployment. Finding suitable full-time work was frequently difficult. Employment status significantly affects participation in study or training courses. In 1997, only 21% of those who were marginally attached to the labour force were involved in training compared with 55% of those who were wage or salary earners. Gonczi (1998) warns that the VET reform process, with its focus on industry requirements and workplace training, has ignored the place in the system for full-time or part-time students who are unemployed.

Dwyer and Wyn (1998) challenge the notion that young people make the transition into adulthood via a linear progression from school to work with post-secondary education as an interim step. Young people now mix study with work and family life, and transitions after high school do not follow clearly defined and anticipated pathways. It is recognised that study alone does not ensure success in finding work, and work experience is also needed to enhance the chances of successfully finding work, either in the form of self-initiated employment or as an integral part of training. The pathways of young people no longer follow a linear model and Dwyer and Wyn (1998) have developed a typology of focus derived from the patterns of responses in their longitudinal study of young people. They described five foci: a vocational focus, giving priority to gaining qualifications to enable a career choice to be made; an occupational focus, giving priority to work; a contextual focus emphasises the 'life' context of family, community and lifestyle; altered patterns, where original routes are reconsidered and changed; and mixed patterns, where equal value is given to a range of activities or goals.

The largest percentage of young people (43%) was characterised by Dwyer and Wyn's (1998) mixed pattern. In this case, education and work are no longer alternatives but complement each other until young people find full-time employment, often not until their 20s (Wooden 1998). Wooden found that VET offers the opportunity for young people, particularly young males, to test their strengths and interests and find a direction in their lives.

In Canada, movements in and out of work, unemployment and education are familiar to young people, and movement in and out of the educational system is expected and considered normal (Looker & Dwyer 1998). This study found that young people do not make educational decisions in isolation from other decisions relating to work.

marriage, parenting and geographical mobility, but make these decisions after balancing the various costs and benefits.

What are the reasons for these more varied transition models? Is it due to the 'structures' that influence young people's lives such as the unresponsive labour market for young people and the rise of casual, part-time employment at the expense of full-time work (Wooden 1998)? Is it influenced by the way young people construct their lives in response to the social, political and economic contexts within which they live? Or is it influenced by young people's conceptions of the transition to adulthood? Arnett (1997) in America has found that for young people, the transition to adulthood is based on 'accepting responsibility for the consequences of your actions, deciding on own beliefs and values independently of parents or other influences and establishing a relationship with parents as an equal adult' (p.3). Criteria such as finishing education, entering the labour force, marriage and parenthood were rejected by a large majority as marking the transition to adulthood, suggesting that current young Americans see the transition to adulthood in intangible, gradual and individualistic terms. Arnett (1997) suggests that, with the increasing number of Americans continuing their education well into adulthood, education be no longer viewed in a linear way with a given endpoint but as available throughout life.

Rudd and Evans (1998) in a UK study found that young people generally maintained high levels of optimism in terms of job aspirations, even in a depressed labour market, and they attributed a high importance to individual effort. They had an optimism that hard work and qualifications would lead to employment, but they were also aware that there was an element of 'luck' in obtaining a job due to 'structures' such as the state of the labour market in their locality, recruitment policies and employer preferences which might be influenced by gender and ethnicity. Dwyer and Wyn (1998) also found that young people in Australia have high expectations regarding future employment, but the likelihood of achieving their aspirations depends on their ability to construct links and experiences which will enable them to reach their goals.

Much of the past research has focussed on school students and school leavers, and there is a need to have empirical data on the reasons why people in employment undertake further study in VET. During the 1990s the percentage of teenagers enrolled in VET courses has fallen from 30% to 20% as a proportion of the total number of VET clients (ANTA 1998a) There is an increasing demand from people in the workforce to update their skills in the current workforce climate of changing skills and occupations, and VET will need to respond to these client demands. There is also a group of mature-age VET students who are not in full-time work but who are returning to study in order to gain employment. This group includes women returning to work and people pursuing a new career direction either for their own personal satisfaction or following retrenchment. There is a need to discover the motivations and methods of choice of those who begin their VET studies when they are already in the workforce or following other studies to improve their employability (Millican 1995).

Recent national studies by ANTA (1997, 1998b), which provide data on TAFE graduates, include students who were in the workforce at the time of commencing their studies. The main reasons students gave for undertaking their TAFE courses in

the 1997 survey were: to get a job or own business (28.8%); for interest or personal development (13.6%); to get extra skills for my job (13.1%); to try for a different career (12.3%); to get a better job or promotion (12%); it was a requirement of my job (10.5%); and to get into another course of study (6.4%). There was only a marginal shift in responses between 1997 and 1998 from personal development reasons to job-related reasons.

Dwyer and Wyn (1988) report a number of young people, particularly males, in their study choosing VET as a space in which they could make some decisions about their lives. VET gave them an opportunity to test their strengths and find a niche. Young women were more focussed on where they wanted to go, were willing to accept changes in direction and even viewed these changes positively in terms of their future goals. They had a vision of the future, and changes in direction and setbacks were accepted as part of the process leading toward their future goal. However, young men saw a strength in remaining relatively fixed in their choices. James et al. (1999b), in a study of Australian school students in their senior school years, also found differences between the behaviour of girls and boys towards their future. They found that girls gave a higher priority to learning, understanding the world, making a contribution to society and having opportunities to travel, whilst boys placed more importance on making money and meeting family expectations.

Golding and Volkoff (1998) studied VET students in the following groups: women; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; long-term unemployed; non-English-speaking background persons; persons with a disability; rural and isolated persons; and persons enrolled for literacy and/or numeracy and/or social skills improvement. They found that a significant number of clients enrolled in VET for reasons associated with broadening their education rather than for specific job-related vocational training. The reasons for the people in this study undertaking VET were presented in eight categories: to get a job; to gain skills or extra skills for a present job; to get a better job, promotion or higher pay; to move to a new career; to get into another course of study; because of an external requirement, such as continuing to receive unemployment benefits; to enhance family or social caring skills, such as enrolling in literacy and/or IT courses for the benefit of children; and to enhance personal/living skills, such as becoming familiar with computers, skills for car maintenance, to provide an interest, for social interaction and raising self-esteem.

In an English study focussing on adult learners, Tremlett and Park (1995) found that most adult learning takes place among those already in work, a reflection of the motivation to learn and differential access to learning opportunities which are presented to individuals as part of their job. Those not in work had to seek out learning opportunities for themselves. The main reasons given by people who were employed for having (re)started vocational learning were: the desire to increase job satisfaction (29%); it was a requirement of employment, or employees were encouraged by managerial staff to undertake training (24%); to help with a job or update skills (11%); and to gain promotion or career progression (8%). For people not in work, the main reason for learning was the desire to find a job. Another British study (Heyes & Stuart 1996) reported that amongst more than 1000 employees, interest in training was high because of its potential to impact on personal satisfaction, job motivation and job performance. An Australian survey by Lundy and Foyster

(1995) of employed vocational education graduates, who at the time of enrolment in their VET course were either employed or unemployed, found the different groups had taken VET courses either for their present job, to get a different job, to get a job or, less commonly, for recreation.

Lundy and Foyster's survey (1995) differentiated between larger and smaller firms and found that large firms are more likely to offer support to their employees to undertake a TAFE course and be more likely to offer financial support. Similar findings were reported by Tremlett and Park (1995): employer commitment to learning was strongest in large organisations but decreased markedly among smaller employers. The 1997 survey of employer training practices in Australia (ABS 1997b) showed that almost 100% of large employers (100 or more employees) and 94% of medium employers (20–99 employees) provided some form of training for employees, compared to 57% of small employers. Large employers supplied more structured training (95%) than medium (76%) and small employers (53%). Many small businesses in Australia do not invest in training as it is not considered financially beneficial (Axarlis 1996). Small business perceives that training is too theoretical, not industry-specific and therefore not relevant. To improve this image, training providers need to steer away from central prescription and allow small businesses to choose from a range of training options in order to meet their specific and individual needs (Mudie 1996). Of persons who had enrolled to study for a post-school qualification in 1997, 19% reported receiving some form of employer support for that study. Types of support provided were: fees payment (62%); paid study leave (50%); payment for study materials (30%); and payment of HECs fees (ABS 1997a).

While employers are providing training to a proportion of the working population, individuals are also financing their own training. Individual voluntary and non-sponsored participation in training represents the major activity of formal VET institutions (Kinsman 1998). Kinsman identifies some of the groups involved: increasingly, school leavers participating in full-time training, part-time participants seeking a change of employment through training; participants seeking to upgrade basic learning and work skills; and graduates of TAFE and universities seeking a further qualification. Billett et al. (1997) link the increased participation in VET by older Victorians with enhancing the State's skill base and embracing the notion of lifelong learning, a concept thought to be essential for success in today's workplaces.

A report from the Victorian University of Technology (1999), formerly the Western Melbourne Institute of TAFE, provided information from a 1997 survey of 1490 students as to the main reasons for students selecting a course in their institution. The Sunraysia Institute of TAFE (1999) also reported their findings from student surveys on the main reasons students had enrolled in a course. Similar results were found in both institutions and the main reasons given for selecting courses were, in order of importance: to get a job/self employment; it was a requirement of a current job; to get a better job/promotion; for personal development; to get into another course; to try for a different career; and for interest/recreation.

Barriers to participation in learning

There are social indicators and gender differences which influence the enrolment of young people in tertiary institutions (Dwyer, Harwood & Tyler 1998). In a 1997 survey of 1334 respondents, males were more likely than females to take up apprenticeships, surveying and information technology courses, and females were more likely than males to enrol in nursing or health, arts and social sciences and education. Of school leavers entering TAFE in 1997, males most commonly enrolled in engineering/surveying and females in business administration, hospitality and transportation (Misko 1999). Almost three-quarters of students from independent schools went to university compared with no more than 41% of government school students and the latter students were more likely to try TAFE courses (Dwyer, Harwood & Tyler 1998).

Socio-economic background factors are related to university entrance, with Year 12 students from professional and managerial backgrounds being more likely to attend university than students from skilled manual or unskilled family backgrounds (Misko 1999). Location also influences tertiary enrolment, with 56% of young people from metropolitan areas likely to go to university compared with 32% of rural respondents entering a tertiary institution. In a study of Australian and Canadian rural youth by Looker and Dwyer (1998), rural youth had less access to post-secondary institutions and decisions as to whether to leave home and the social networks of a close-knit community were stressful. Amongst prospective university students James et al. (1999a) found that lower socio-economic applicants were more concerned with short-term practical issues, such as location of an institution, than students from a higher socio-economic background. They are more likely to consider options which minimise the need for travel and relocation because of the cost involved, possibly at the expense of the quality of the university experience.

Tremlett and Park (1995) found in the UK that the main barriers to adult participation in learning in order of priority were cost, domestic/personal commitments, lack of knowledge about learning opportunities, insufficient qualifications, and literacy and numeracy problems.

Private providers in the training market

In the current VET environment, potential students now have a choice of training providers, described as public (generally thought of as TAFE) or private providers. For the market to operate, clients must have sufficient information for them to make informed decisions (Christie 1997), but the information on the role of private providers in the delivery of their programs in Australia is limited (Anderson 1995; Barnett 1997). There may be two reasons for this situation: first, despite the enormous number of registered private providers in Australia, they cater to a very small percentage (somewhere between 5% and 15%) of total VET enrolments; second, many private providers are not responsive to requests for participation in outside studies (such as this one), to some extent because they often have little leeway for

non-commercial activities, but also because they often are protective of their commercial interests (with some notable exceptions, for which the authors of this study are grateful).

Private providers generally specialise in the provision of business and personal services training due to the cost of infrastructure in the trade and technical fields and they frequently respond to areas of unmet demand in the public sector (Anderson 1995). Niche marketing for private providers is one way the private sector can compete successfully with TAFE along with delivering superior customer service focussed on customer needs (Clugston 1995; Mudie 1996; Noble et al. 1998).

Current context

The importance of understanding the ways in which participants arrive at a decision to enrol in VET programs cannot be underrated in the current context of employment demands and changes in the Australian economy. Several reviews have pointed to the necessity of providing for much higher participation rates in VET in the future (Carmichael 1993; Finn 1991; West 1998, and this carries with it the implication of more deliberate promotion and recruitment for VET programs as well as the development of more attractive programs. Another aspect of participation is the need to reduce attrition and wastage, which is an ongoing problem in VET and other post-compulsory settings (Maxwell & Cumming 1990; Symons 1999; Uren 1999) and has the potential to become more problematic as education and training attempt to move towards flexible delivery and independent learning (Maxwell & Cumming in preparation). There is an urgent need to ensure that trainee choice is well informed and that there is a close match between trainee expectations and course offerings. Counsellors and other personal advisors are likely to be key participants in producing better matches between trainees and courses and are, therefore, a key source of understandings of trainee choice and expectations, as well as a key audience for the findings of this research.

This project widens the focus of previous research to consider the educational, vocational and personal aspirations of VET clients and to include the experiences of other representative sections of the VET community. It also presents representative national data from city, metropolitan, rural and remote areas, from four main fields of VET study, and from all five levels of VET award programs.

3 Survey

Background

The survey collected information from a representative sample of students in VET programs across Australia on various aspects of their choice of enrolment in VET. The target students were in the first year of their studies in their current VET program. A written questionnaire was developed and sent to participating institutions for distribution to chosen classes of students. The questionnaires were completed in class and returned by mail in bulk. Items on the questionnaire covered student background characteristics, ratings on various aspects of their choice of program and open-ended comments.

The sample plan of institutions (see appendix 1) was compiled after consideration of the Australian VET statistics of 1997 published by NCVER. Using these statistics, the four fields of study were chosen from those with the highest percentage of clients: business, 27%; engineering, 16%; tourism and hospitality, 12%; and health and community services, 9%. An 80/20 split between public and private providers of accredited VET training was made, over-representing private providers in terms of student enrolment but ensuring meaningful representation of private providers. The *Australian directory of vocational education and training, 1998/1999* 4th ed., was used as the training provider database. This database proved to be unreliable in some instances because it contained inaccurate and out-of-date information. Information about private providers, in particular, was often limited and sometimes inaccurate in relation to addresses, contact persons and courses offered. Even among TAFE institutes the information on course offerings and contact persons was sometimes out of date.

From the outset we had difficulty finding appropriate private providers due to the lack of information in the database. It was suggested by the reviewers of the first interim report that 'it would be appropriate to include in-house training (for example, the big hotel chains)' and that 'skill centres would be a possibility for engineering'. To this end a further seven large hotel chains and two motor vehicle manufacturers were sent invitations to participate in the project. None of these responded. Several skill centres were invited to participate, but only one agreed. None of the engineering skill centres who were approached agreed to participate.

A total of 27 TAFE institutes covering 36 campuses was contacted, usually with requests for more than one field of study and sometimes more than one level within a field of study. Requests were made to institutes, and sometimes specific campuses, in order to match the sampling plan; for example, centres of particular population size. In addition, 33 private providers were contacted mainly for one field of study only, but sometimes for more than one level of study within the field. In all cases we asked the

directors to nominate staff teaching in those fields who would be responsible for administering the questionnaire to a group of between 10 and 20 students.

A second sampling was made later in February for replacements of those sites that had indicated they would not be part of the study or who did not respond. A similar process to that of the initial sampling was adopted, with selection of sites made to fill the gaps and restore the balance of the original sampling plan. A total of 36 TAFE institutes (covering 55 campuses) and 29 private providers was contacted. In some cases, TAFE institutes which had already agreed to participate in one field of study were approached with respect to another field of study or another campus. The large number of institutes contacted at this stage was due to the fact that some large institutes declined to participate and other institutes indicated only a partially positive response. This means that almost all TAFE institutes in the participating States were approached. In the case of the private providers, none of the replacement institutions had been approached previously.

The sample of institutions which indicated they would take part in the project is given in appendix 2. The fields of study that proved most difficult to fill in the sampling frame were engineering and tourism/hospitality offered by private providers. It was also difficult to find participating institutions in some rural and remote areas. The participating institutions are listed in appendix 11.

The original intention was to distribute the questionnaire in February 1999, but, due to the difficulty of obtaining sites, the questionnaire was not distributed until April 1999. This seems close enough to the beginning of the year not to invalidate students' responses to the questions about influences on their enrolments.

Questionnaire

Three types of information were collected with the questionnaire:

- background data such as age, gender, ethnicity, educational and work history and enrolment
- forced-choice items on reasons for choosing the course, influences on enrolment, consideration of alternatives, self-image, course satisfaction and occupational aspirations
- open-ended items elaborating on forced-choice items and how personal history influenced enrolment

Demographic characteristics

A total of 1501 questionnaires was returned, substantially short of the original target but satisfactorily representative in terms of the balance of desired characteristics. Table 1 shows the number of students surveyed within each field of study.

Further background information provided by the questionnaire included statistics for gender, age, ethnicity, language, education and vocational awards. The distributions on these variables appear in appendix 3.

A brief employment history of each respondent was requested, covering current employment and the time employed in that position as well as the size of the employer's business. Of the 1491 who responded to the item on current employment, 324 (22%) were in full-time employment, 498 (33%) were in part-time employment and 669 (45%) were not employed. Of the 811 respondents who were employed, 803 provided information about the size of the current employer's business with 298 (37%) in small business (fewer than 20 employees), 236 (29%) in medium-sized businesses (20–100 employees) and 269 (33%) in businesses employing more than 100 persons. The statistics on length of current employment showed that most of the 800 who responded had been employed for only a short time in that enterprise. The details of those responses are shown in appendix 4.

Table 1: Numbers of respondents and institutions per field of study

Field of study	Number of respondents	Number of institutions
Business	351	26
Engineering	302	24
Health & community welfare	436	30
Tourism & hospitality	412	28

As part of the employment and education background of the respondents, an item sought information concerning their situation in the preceding year, 1998. It was possible to select more than one response because more than one activity could be carried on simultaneously or there could have been a change during the year. These possibilities produce a total which exceeds the number of questionnaires returned as well as some apparently absurd combinations, such as *looking for work* and *not working, not looking for work* which are, in fact, quite possible over an extended period of time. The eight possibilities provided in the survey and the number of responses to each are shown in appendix 5.

Questions about training uncovered that the great majority of respondents, 1174 (81%), were being trained completely within the college and 268 (19%) at both college and at work. Most respondents to this item, 1107 (75%), studied full time compared with 365 (25%) part time (see appendix 3).

These demographic characteristics are much as expected and support the overall representativeness of the response sample. Further support is evident by comparing the response sample with national statistics as provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (see table 2).

Table 2: Comparison of selected characteristics of response sample with ABS statistics (expressed as percentages)

Characteristic	Response sample	ABS statistics
Business enrolments in TAFE	23	23
Engineering enrolments in TAFE	20	24
Students currently in employment	55	55
Students in public institutions	87	87
Students in private institutions	13	13
Female	58	59

Findings

Influence on choice

Students were asked about the extent to which certain factors influenced them to enrol in their chosen course. Students were asked to respond to each factor on a five-point scale, from 'not at all' to 'a huge amount'. The results are shown in table 3. The number of respondents to each factor varied from 1342 to 1446, and the results are given as a percentage response to each level of influence. The means are calculated on a scale of 1–5, with 1 representing 'not at all' and 5 representing 'a huge amount'. The items have been ordered from high to low mean. This order would be almost exactly the same if based on the percentage response to the top three categories.

The means show that, on average, the most influential factor for students on their enrolment in a VET course is *work experience or employment* (mean = 2.2). This is followed by the *influence of parents or guardians* (mean = 2.1), *advertising booklets or handbooks from institutions* (mean = 2.0) and *school subjects* (mean = 2.0). While these are the highest means, the level of influence overall is relatively small, since a mean of 2.0 represents 'a small amount'. These four items are also the highest ranking items if a criterion of more that 15% is chosen for the two top categories combined, or of more than 30% for the top three categories combined.

Following this cluster of items was the influence of a *personal friend* (mean = 1.9), *other family member* (mean = 1.8), *personal experience of study at a college or university* (mean = 1.7) and an *employer* (mean = 1.7). These were followed by another cluster of factors associated with advice from guidance officers, teachers and information officers at institutions, and advertising by VET institutions in the form of newspaper and magazine advertising, open days and careers expos and workplace visits (means from 1.4 to 1.6). The lowest means were recorded for the influence of a radio or television advertisement (mean = 1.2), job centres or job clubs (mean = 1.2) and the internet (mean = 1.1), possibly reflecting the limited experience of these factors for many students.

Table 3: How much each person or thing influenced a student's enrolment in their course (percentage responses)

Influence on enrolment	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
Work experience or employment	53	10	13	11	14	2.2	1.5
Parent or guardian	44	21	9	11	6	2.1	1.3
Advertising booklets or handbooks of institutions	53	17	16	10	5	2.0	1.2
School subjects	56	14	14	11	6	2.0	1.3
Personal friend	53	19	15	8	5	1.9	1.2
Other family member	58	20	13	5	4	1.8	1.1
Personal experience of study at college or university	68	10	9	7	6	1.7	1.2
Employer	73	9	6	6	7	1.7	1.2
School teacher/guidance officer/ careers adviser	71	12	8	6	3	1.6	1.1
College visit or open day or careers expo	71	11	10	5	3	1.6	1.1
College instructor/college careers adviser	72	12	9	5	2	1.5	1.0
Phone conversation with institution information officer	74	12	7	5	2	1.5	1.0
Workplace visit	80	6	6	5	3	1.4	1.0
Newspaper or magazine advertisement	77	10	8	3	2	1.4	0.9
Radio or television advertisement	87	8	4	1	0	1.2	0.6
Job centre or job club	89	6	3	1	1	1.2	0.6
Internet	94	3	2	0	0	1.1	0.4

1 = Not at all 2 = A small amount 3 = A fair amount 4 = A large amount 5 = A huge amount

When these data are analysed in more detail and each item of influence considered with regard to the responses at each level of influence—that is, from no influence at all to a huge influence—*work experience or employment* clearly stands out as the factor which had the greatest influence on student enrolment. The percentage of students who responded at the highest level of influence for this item 'a huge amount' was 14%, with the next highest percentages at this level being 7% for *employer* and 6% for *parent or guardian* and for *personal experience of study at college or university*. When this level of influence was combined with 'a large amount' of influence, 25% of students responded to the influence of *work experience or employment*. This was followed by 17% of students responding to the item *parent or guardian* and 17% responding to the influence of *school subjects*. Other factors rating more than a 10% response when the two highest levels of influence were combined were *advertising booklets or handbooks from institutions* (15%), *personal experience of study at college or university* (13%), *personal friends* (13%) and *employer* (13%).

Work experience or employment is an influential factor for people enrolling in VET programs. Part of this would reflect the compulsory nature of training for apprentices and trainees, but other people in work are upgrading or extending skills, some are developing new skills for career changes and young people might have based their enrolments on their work experiences at school. This survey included school leavers and mature-age students involved in VET study and therefore differs from the surveys recorded in the literature review which studied factors of influence on secondary school student decisions regarding further study. Typically, amongst secondary school students the important influence on student choice is parents, but parental influence, clearly, is likely to be less important among people of mature age. Even so, in this survey, parental influences did rate highly and had the lowest percentage response of all items for 'not at all' and was also the only item with less than 50% for 'not at all'. Items recording less than 3% for the two higher levels of influence were the *internet* (1%), *radio and television advertisement* (1%) and *job centres or job clubs* (2%). These three methods of obtaining information may not have been available to many students, and for the large majority of students (87%, 89% and 94% respectively), the data suggest that these factors had hardly any influence at all.

All the items except one (influence of *parent or guardian*) have the majority of students saying that each factor had no influence at all. In fact, the most common response to all items is 'not at all'. Influences are quite diffuse and are separately unexceptional. Another indication of this is that the percentage across all items for all respondents on the category 'a huge amount' is only 69% (representing, because of some individual multiple responses, a maximum of approximately two-thirds of the sample). In other words, for a lot of students, there is no overwhelming single influence, but rather a combination of influences, each contributory but not conclusive in itself.

Whilst *work experience or employment* was seen as influential to at least some extent by almost half the students, less than one in three were influenced to any extent by an *employer*. Of the students surveyed, only 22% were in full-time employment, 33% were in part-time employment and 45% were unemployed. This is an important issue in view of the national policy agenda of defining employers as the primary users of VET. As seen elsewhere in this study, there is little support here for an employer-driven VET system. Most VET students clearly see their motivation as individually based.

The survey asked for students to nominate any additional influences to those in the list presented. An additional influence on enrolment that students often listed was the TAFE handbook which lists all the TAFE courses within each State. Students commented that the information from TAFEs in the form of brochures and handbooks is very good, suggesting that TAFE institutes are successful in producing material which is helpful to potential clients. One student commented that 'the course information booklet most influenced me. It outlined what was involved in the course and the outcome'. What we don't know is how easy it is for people to access the information that VET providers produce. TAFEs are advertising in football magazines, pubs and pool halls, but we do not know how successful these methods are.

Frequent comments were made about the influence of open days at institutions, the information sessions given by VET providers and the influence of personal discussions with teaching staff in these institutions. Some students also commented on the influence of information received through the mail; for example, 'I received a pamphlet in the mail and had been thinking that I wanted to further my education—childcare seemed interesting and I like dealing with children' and 'I received a pamphlet in the mail, it sounded great'. Mail advertising, when received at the right time, can give people the final impetus to enrol in some training. Advertising received through the mail influenced those people who had thought they might like to enrol in a VET course but had not taken the next step of researching information about courses themselves. When the information was presented to them and because they were receptive to the idea of training, they were ready to take the steps required which would lead to enrolment in a VET course.

Newspaper, radio and TV advertising had relatively low means of 1.4 and 1.2 respectively, but site visits revealed conflicting information about the influence of newspaper advertising. Amongst young people, particularly those in pre-employment courses with private providers, the local newspaper was their means of hearing about the course they were enrolled in. For others, however, the physical presence of the local TAFE college was influential in their enrolment and not the other means of advertising that their local college used, such as local newspaper advertisements. This could mean that for private providers, newspaper advertising is a powerful means of reaching their clients, whereas the history of TAFE and TAFE's physical presence are more influential for students considering TAFE as an option for study.

Students' descriptions of other influences on their enrolment in VET revealed a strong emphasis on personal decision-making which was described as 'my own initiative', 'my personal decision to better myself', 'my own goals', 'myself', 'personal interest", 'my own personal desire to achieve' and 'I didn't need information to influence me in a choice of course; I have always wanted to be a nurse'. Some students, especially in the health field, broadened this slightly to encompass 'life experiences' but provided no further details. This suggests that a lot of people see themselves as the most important influence in their enrolment in VET. This may be a logical response in terms of students' desire to undertake a course but such students appear unaware of other factors operating when choices are made. For example, it is necessarily the case that students must have heard of or obtained information about the course from some source or sources. The question is whether greater self-awareness would produce better decisions through more deliberate, considered and self-conscious decision-making. The limitations of students' perceptions of potential career paths (see later) suggest that there is such a need. A component of this would be greater self-awareness of the way in which their decisions are being shaped and made, a meta-cognitive level of knowledge of their own thinking processes and how to manage those thinking processes more deliberately. This is an important issue revisited later in the report.

Some students were, of course, already more conscious of factors influencing their choice. In the written comments, employment-related issues were mentioned by some students as influencing their enrolment in VET. Such issues included: the need to become qualified to get work; enrolment in a specified VET course was a requirement of the job; and workplace experiences had influenced some students to take up further

study, either for personal interest or to enhance their chances of better employment. In the field of hospitality, the prospect of being able to work anywhere in the world, the availability of jobs, and the varied work were recorded as influences on enrolment. Some students commented on the influence of the labour market in choosing their field of study; for example, 'there are not many refrigeration mechanics so I was convinced that there would be a shortage of good mechanics; therefore [it is] a good trade to get into [and] good money' and 'from watching the employment situation there seemed to be a great demand in the metal trades for welders'.

Students commented on the particular ways in which experience of work influenced them to enrol in their VET course. For some, this experience may have been at school; for example, 'I did it at school and really liked this line of work'. Others commented on how work experience influenced their enrolment; for example, 'work experience did, because it showed me how the hospitality industry runs and what skills you need to be able to make a career out of it'; 'work experience in a nursing home made me want to study in this path' and 'after I participated in work experience at both a resort and a travel agency, I knew tourism was right for me'. In the field of health, some students said that volunteer work in the community had made them realise that they would like to gain employment in the field. A few students referred to the encouragement their teachers had given them to enrol in VET, particularly in the fields of engineering and hospitality, and to the help that guidance officers had given in making choices about their future goals.

Written comments also revealed the influence that parents can have on students' VET enrolment. Sometimes this was in a consultative role where the parents and the student discussed choices of a career path, but in other instances, students were in a course because their parents had insisted they be at school, in a job or at TAFE, and TAFE for these participants in the study was preferable. In the field of engineering, parents and other family members were often mentioned as influencing course enrolments. An engineering student stated he was an apprentice toolmaker 'because my family members all do it' and another commented 'my father's a fitter and my uncle's a boilermaker'. One student described his friends' and family's influence on his choice of course, and their perception that a trade would be worthwhile in the future, as 'information from friends who are in the trade or who have a trade and family wanting me to have a secure future'.

Some students commented on the importance that friends have in influencing their choice of course. Often, friends have taken a TAFE course themselves and have given positive feedback of their experience and this has encouraged a student to enrol in a similar course. In one case the importance of positive experience was described in the following way: 'The information that most influenced me in the choice of course was that from other people who have previously completed the course; these people were very positive'. Another student described the influence of friends as 'information from two friends doing the same course (telling me) about the job and the job's future'. For another student, a friend's experience was the main influence on his VET enrolment: 'A friend told me about a course he did the other year and I was not sure what I wanted to do so I gave this course a go'.

In summary, choice of course is essentially an individual matter in which personal knowledge and experience are, not surprisingly, very important. The particular mix of influences differs from person to person and no single influence is typically definitive. However, knowledge seems to derive mainly form traditional sources, especially family and friends, printed brochures and handbooks, and work experience. The data suggest that some students are more self-aware in their decision-making than others. There is a prima-facie case that many students could benefit from training in the use of more deliberate choice strategies. This will be necessary if their range of information sources is to be expanded (for example, into less traditional sources) and if their decision strategies are to become more self-conscious and reflective.

Reasons for choosing the course

Students were asked the degree of importance they attached to various reasons for choosing their current course. Students were asked to indicate on a five-point scale from 'not at all' to 'a huge amount'. The results are shown in table 4. The number of respondents to each reason varied from 1427 to 1479 and the results are given as a percentage response to each level of importance. The means were calculated on a scale of 1–5, with 1 representing 'not at all' and 5 representing 'a huge amount'. The items have been ordered from the highest to the lowest mean. This order would be almost exactly the same if based on the percentage response to the top, top two or top three categories.

Table 4: How much importance is attached to reasons for choosing a course (percentage responses)

Reasons for choosing this course	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
To gain qualifications	2	3	10	27	58	4.4	0.9
To get a job	9	7	14	21	49	3.9	1.3
There are good job opportunities in this field	7	8	22	27	36	3.8	1.2
I really wanted to do this course	7	11	23	22	37	3.7	1.3
I like this area of study	7	9	25	25	33	3.7	1.2
For interest or personal development	11	14	23	23	30	3.5	1.3
It will lead to a well-paid job	14	13	22	21	31	3.4	1.4
To obtain a more challenging job	23	11	17	22	27	3.2	1.5
To gain more job satisfaction	36	10	18	16	20	2.8	1.6
To acquire skills to run my own business	35	19	17	12	18	2.6	1.5
As a stepping stone to another course	38	18	18	11	15	2.5	1.5
To change career	47	11	12	12	19	2.4	1.6
To update skills	52	11	11	11	14	2.2	1.5
Required by employer	72	6	7	6	11	1.8	1.4
Required for apprenticeship or traineeship	74	5	4	4	13	1.8	1.4
To obtain a promotion	74	7	7	6	7	1.6	1.2

1 = Not at all 2 = A small amount 3 = A fair amount 4 = A large amount 5 = A huge amount

The quantitative data from this question show that the most important reason given by students for participating in a VET course was *to gain qualifications* (mean = 4.4). This was followed by *to get a job* (mean = 3.9) and *there are good job opportunities in this field* (mean = 3.8). These reasons, which have an immediate job focus, were closely followed by three reasons which encompass an individual's personal interest in pursuing a course of study. They were *I really wanted to do this course, I like this area of study* and *for interest or personal development.* The means for these three factors ranged between 3.5 and 3.7. Following these reasons were four factors associated with employment: *it will lead to a well-paid job* (mean = 3.4); *to obtain a more challenging job* (mean = 3.2); *to gain more job satisfaction* (mean = 2.8); and *to acquire skills to run my own business* (mean = 2.6). Some students saw the course they were taking *as a stepping stone to another course* (mean = 2.5) and others wanted *to change career* (mean = 2.4). At the lower end of the scale were factors associated with an individual's current work situation, such as *required by employer, required for apprenticeship or traineeship* or *to obtain a promotion.* The means for these factors ranged from 1.6 to 1.8. A low mean amongst these reasons is to be expected since only 22% of people in the sample were in full-time employment and 45% were not employed; the remainder were in part-time employment. The data show that, of the people enrolled in VET in this study, the majority were there of their own initiative and were not being supported by an employer. They were enrolled to obtain a VET qualification in order to get a job, to enhance their skills, to obtain more job satisfaction or for personal fulfillment.

Another way of looking at these data is to consider the distribution, not just the means. The modal (most common) responses for the first eight items (down to *to obtain a more challenging job*) are for 'a huge amount'. The modal responses for the remaining eight items are for 'not at all'. Only the first item and last four items have modal responses over 50%. A similar breakdown emerges by combining categories 4 and 5 or by combining categories 3, 4 and 5. For the first eight items, over one-half (approximately) of the respondents chose the top two categories and over two-thirds (approximately) of the respondents chose the top three categories. There is a clear difference from the remaining eight items as shown in table 5. Note, too, that the first eight items have means above the mid-point of the scale (3.0 = 'a fair amount').

In other words, getting qualifications, obtaining jobs and personal interest figure prominently in the choice of VET programs. On the other hand, employer requirements, job requirements, skills updating and promotion opportunities figure to any extent for only about a quarter of students and for even fewer as an important reason for choice of program. An employer-driven training market is not evident here.

Recent national studies by ANTA (1997, 1998b), cited in the literature review, found the main reason students undertook a TAFE course was *to get a job (or own business)* (29% response). This was followed by *for interest or personal development* and *to get extra skills for my job* (14% and 13% respectively). *To try for a different career* or *to get a better job or promotion* were the next most frequently nominated items (both 12%) followed by *it was a requirement of my job* (11%). *To get into another course of study* was the last nominated item (6%) and other reasons were given by 3% of students. There is a similarity between these responses and those of the current study given that the list of nominated items in the ANTA study is smaller and people were

not asked to rate the importance of items. A later item in the current survey recorded that 11% of students were enrolled in their course because their employer sent them, an identical statistic to the ANTA finding of 11% of students undertaking a TAFE course because it was a requirement of their job.

Table 5: Combined categories for the data in table 4 (percentage responses)

Reasons for choosing this course	Categories 4 & 5	Categories 3, 4 & 5
To gain qualifications	85	95
To get a job	70	84
There are good job opportunities in this field	63	85
I really wanted to do this course	59	82
I like this area of study	58	83
For interest or personal development	53	76
It will lead to a well-paid job	52	74
To obtain a more challenging job	49	66
To gain more job satisfaction	36	54
To acquire skills to run my own business	30	47
As a stepping stone to another course	26	44
To change career	31	43
To update skills	25	36
Required by employer	17	24
Required for apprenticeship or traineeship	17	21
To obtain a promotion	13	20

The qualitative data for this item, together with input from students on site visits, provided information which supplemented the quantitative data and gave an insight into the range of issues involved in the process of decision-making. In order to provide a structure for analysing these qualitative data, a factor analysis of the questionnaire survey data was conducted. A three-factor structure was selected as being most interpretable. The three factors were an immediate job focus, personal development and aspiration, and acquiring or updating skills for current employment.

These three factors are almost identical to the first three items listed in the previously mentioned ANTA studies (1997, 1998b). The difference here is that other items are subsumed within the three factors. The relative positioning of students on the items is strongly correlated across items within each factor and relatively uncorrelated between factors (see appendix 6). That is, the students give similar responses to the items within each factor but different responses to items on the other factors. These three factors therefore sum up the three different types of reasons students give for choosing VET programs, with different students emphasising different reasons.

This three-factor structure is used below to discuss the qualitative student data. The import of the factor structure is that students with one of these orientations are less likely to have the other two orientations.

Immediate job focus—necessity of qualifications

For unemployed people or underemployed people, employability is important in influencing choice of course. Tables 2 and 3 show that one of the strongest reasons why students enrolled in their course was that they felt there were good job opportunities in the field of study they had chosen. Student comments revealed that they often enrolled in hospitality and tourism courses because they perceived there were good work opportunities in the field and there would be opportunities for work and travel throughout Australia and overseas, once they had attained a formal qualification. The enrolment of one tourism and hospitality student in Sydney was based on the anticipated work available in Sydney in the year 2000, 'I only chose it because my dad's friend said that there will be good job opportunities in this field in the year 2000. I didn't have a clue what the course was really like so I just chose it for the sake of getting a job'.

Some students in courses in the engineering field were looking for qualifications that would lead them to meaningful employment, as opposed to their past employment experiences which had been intermittent, part-time and insecure. They were repositioning themselves in courses which related to a job market in which they thought there would be a stronger possibility of employment. Metal fabrication was one such area in Queensland and the refrigeration and air-conditioning trade was another in New South Wales. Students looking for an apprenticeship enrolled in pre-apprentice or pre-employment courses to enhance their chances of gaining protected, full-time work. Students report that employers do not want to spend time developing the basic trade skills in would-be apprentices and say 'do your pre-employment, which is equivalent to a first year, and then we will give you a job'.

In the field of business, mature-age women were often developing or upgrading their skills in order to return to work, and in the field of health, mature-age women were obtaining a qualification in order to continue working or obtain work, particularly in the area of aged care. A mature-age hospitality student wrote, 'my past working experience was in the hospitality industry and being out of the workforce for years I thought it was an excellent way to learn and become up to date with terms and technology within the industry'.

Personal interest and aspiration

The second factor concerning reasons for choosing their course was concerned with satisfying personal interest and aspirations. This included the following reasons:

- for personal satisfaction
- to enhance self-development
- for affirmation of self
- to avoid mental and emotional stagnation

- for socialising and networking
- to establish a direction for career and lifestyle

Questionnaire comments revealed that people chose certain VET courses because of their interest in a field of study: 'I just love this field of study'; 'I've always wanted to do this course'; 'It's been a lifelong ambition to complete this course'; 'I just knew it was for me and I knew I would be interested and I'd enjoy it'. In addition to interest, people sometimes mentioned that they felt a certain field of study would suit their personality or character. These comments were most frequently made by students in the fields of tourism and hospitality and health. A tourism and hospitality student commented that their course 'seems to fit in with my personality and I enjoy talking and meeting with other people', and in the field of health, students frequently commented that they liked working with people, helping them and talking to them. Students were also looking for challenges: 'to challenge myself; to keep me busy and on my feet, to keep my mind educated and satisfy my brain/mind, heart, passion and interest'. And some wanted to avoid stagnation: 'this was a good way of doing something with myself other than doing nothing but watching TV'; 'something to do, rather than sit at home all day, something different'.

Students who enrolled in courses in the field of health often had a desire to be involved in a 'worthwhile' occupation which involved 'being able to help people' and they felt that work in this area would fulfil those aims. Some of these students had worked in other jobs for long periods of time but now wanted more meaningful work. This was described by one respondent as 'I used to work in my twenties as an accountant in a hospital and always thought what the nurses did was a far better job than what I was doing, hence the change in career when the opportunity arose'. Another student commented, after years of working in retail, 'I felt I needed a job which was challenging and had substance ... in something that meant more to me'. People felt they would be able to make a difference to the quality of care provided to patients, particularly in the area of aged care, where some of the respondents stated they had worked or were working.

Some mature-age women, whose children have become more independent, are enrolling in courses to enhance their self-esteem and affirm their capabilities in taking on a course of study now that their lives are not entirely focussed on child rearing. Some questionnaire comments describe this motivation: 'I have taken on this course for my own self-esteem and confidence and to be known for myself other than a wife and mother'; 'I am tired of staying at home playing the role as "Mum" which I have done for several years now; I have always enjoyed cooking and management, of which I have some experience and have always desired to take it further; now I am determined to'.

Many students, who work full time during the day, are looking for extra qualifications or extra protection in the future as the market place changes. An employed student described his reasons for enrolling in a business course as 'I am studying for personal satisfaction and to keep myself marketable and my brain active'. Some people consider a course for the variety of training that it involves thus positioning themselves to take advantage of a range of options.

In all fields of study some people enrol in courses in order to establish a new career direction. A student in a business course was enrolled 'mainly to gain employment in this field; I'm a chef by trade; I wanted to change jobs and enjoy it, all at the same time'. Career changes are made with considerations beyond developing a new set of skills. There can be a number of factors associated with the decision to change career, such as wanting more flexibility in a job, wanting more flexible working hours and wanting to be involved in a more humanitarian role within the community with more human interaction.

Some students are enrolled in a course not their first choice but are there because it is a course they were able to get into. One student in the tourism and hospitality field of study vividly described this in the following way: 'My tertiary entrance rank was so low my first preferences were cancelled out and this course (my fifth preference) was the only course to accept me'.

Other students see a TAFE course as a stepping stone to university. Some enrol in TAFE courses in order to upgrade their tertiary entrance rank with the aim of attending university. One year in a diploma course is considered as a way to upgrade low-to-middle range tertiary entrance rank. Other people use TAFE as a means of obtaining a qualification which will articulate with a university course and be given some credit in that course. This was most common amongst students in the fields of health and business and, for some, the combination of TAFE and university is a cheaper way of obtaining a university qualification than studying solely at a university. Some students who enrol in TAFE courses, particularly mature-age students, enrol in courses 'to get back into studying' and they sometimes leave to go to university once they realise that they have the skills to study at university level. They use a TAFE course to 'test themselves out first before attempting university'. One student described this as 'using this course as a start for uni Bachelor of Social Science using the course to be sure I have the ability and desire to do this at uni'.

To acquire or upgrade skills for current employment

Some students are enrolled in courses to develop skills in their current job or to upgrade their work skills. Some people in this group are sent for training by their employer and others fund their own training in order to maintain their jobs by ensuring that they have the current skills required for their employment.

Apprentices and trainees fit into this category as they are acquiring skills associated with their current employment. These students are involved in courses because it is a requirement of their job, and the choice they would have made concerning enrolment in VET was at the time of taking up their apprenticeship or traineeship. Apprentices see their training as a valuable component of their job as it provides them with a nationally recognised formal trade qualification.

The site visits revealed that some young people became apprentices as this was one way for them to secure a job. They sometimes take on an apprenticeship with very little knowledge of the work they will be involved in but take the job as opportunities present themselves. One apprentice described this as, 'when I first started I thought, fitter and turner, what the hell do they do; I had no idea'. Another Year 12 school leaver wanted to be an electrician, but a job in fitting and turning came up first: 'My

cousins told me it sounded like a good job so I applied and got it; so I didn't do what I really wanted to do'. The apprentices were usually young people who described themselves as 'wanting to work with their hands'.

Students employed as enrolled nurses frequently commented that the reason they took their job was to enable them to be paid while they were training. For some of the mature-age students who had family commitments, this was the only way they could pursue a career in nursing. As a married man with children described: 'I wanted to be trained and be paid while I was doing it'. A mature-age woman with children commented similarly on the enrolled nursing course: 'I had wanted to do this ... [but] I wanted an income because I was working full time before taking this up so I couldn't afford to give away a full time job; it was a great opportunity to have the training and be paid at the same time'.

In the fields of engineering and business, people enrolled in VET programs to improve their skills, to keep up to date and sometimes to maintain positions. Amongst business students it was stated as vital to keep up to date with technology changes and this was an important reason for people in this field enrolling in VET courses. Others enrolled in business courses to gain skills for setting up a small business or to enhance skills in this area. In the field of health, many students were enrolled in order to keep their jobs as qualifications become mandatory. In hospitality, people who had been working in the industry for many years were enrolled in order to obtain some qualifications.

Expectations of the course

Students were asked about their expectations of the course, in particular about the likelihood of certain outcomes. Students were asked to indicate the likelihood of each outcome being produced, using the same five-point scale as for the earlier questions. The overall results are shown in table 6. The number of respondents was 1467. The means are calculated on a scale of 1–5, with 1 representing 'not at all' and 5 representing 'a huge amount'. The items have been ordered from highest to lowest mean. This order would be exactly the same if based on the percentage response to the top three categories.

Table 6: Likelihood of the course producing each outcome (percentage responses)

Experiences	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
Helping me develop new skills	1	4	15	32	48	4.2	0.9
Giving me a feeling of success	27	9	28	32	29	3.8	1.1
Helping me reach my work goals	5	10	23	29	34	3.8	1.1
Building on the skills I already have	6	12	23	29	29	3.6	1.2
Interest and excitement	6	14	27	25	28	3.6	1.2
Helping me decide if I want a job in this field	12	13	20	23	32	3.5	1.4

1 = Not at all 2 = A small amount 3 = A fair amount 4 = A large amount 5 = A huge amount

Students were generally positive about these types of outcomes. The means are all within the range 'a large amount' (± 0.5). Modal values are one of the top two categories ('a large amount' or 'a huge amount'). The most positive response is to the likelihood that the course will help to develop new skills. This is consistent with the general reason for choosing the course to gain qualifications. Students therefore anticipate that their main expectations of the course will be fulfilled; that is, that there will be a match between expectation and experience.

Students also expect the course to give them a feeling of success, although it would appear to be somewhat less enthusiastically supported than the idea of gaining new skills. As the survey was conducted early in the course, the students could well be struggling with new concepts, equipment and competencies and might find these experiences rather daunting at this stage. Later, it would be hoped, when they have new skills, their expectations of success might be increased.

It is not surprising that the respondents were quite positive about the course helping them to reach their work goals as it would seem apparent that most have enrolled in a vocational course for this very purpose, but there is a larger number with lower expectations. The newness of the course, contrasted with the distant goals, such as the attainment of qualifications and enhanced employment situation, could alarm students who have insufficient experience and expertise to feel more confident about their future. A similar response is found on the issue of building on existing skills. Students have enrolled in these courses from a wide range of backgrounds. Amongst them are those commencing an entirely new type of training who might believe they have few skills in the field of study to build on.

Although the response is still quite positive concerning the degree of interest and excitement engendered by the course, there are many students (almost 20%) who do not have high expectations in this regard. At least at this point in the course, they are not expecting interest and excitement. Interest and excitement could grow as expertise and confidence are attained. However, this could be an issue that course developers should consider to circumvent the high drop-out rate early in VET courses. Most believe quite strongly that the course will help them decide if they want a job in this field, although about 12% have no expectation of this and a further 13%, only a small amount. This could be accounted for by those students who are in full-time employment and who feel satisfied with the field of work they have chosen.

The means on this item for each of the four fields of study are shown in table 7. Health and community welfare students have the most positive expectations of all outcomes, except for *helping decide if I want a job in this field* which is viewed more likely by the tourism and hospitality students. These two groups have equal expectations of their courses with regard to helping develop new skills and they generally have the most positive expectations of their courses.

Table 7: Breakdown by fields of study for likelihood of the course producing each outcome (means of responses)

Experiences	B	E	H	T
Helping me develop new skills	4.1	4.0	4.3	4.3
Helping me reach my work goals	3.6	3.6	4.0	3.8
Giving me a feeling of success	3.6	3.4	4.1	3.8
Building on the skills I already have	3.6	3.5	3.8	3.7
Interest and excitement	3.2	3.3	3.9	3.7
Helping me decide if I want a job in this field	3.5	3.1	3.5	3.7

B = Business E = Engineering H = Health & community welfare T = Tourism & hospitality

Business and engineering students have lower expectations than those in health and community welfare and tourism and hospitality. Engineering students recorded the lowest mean for *helping me decide if I want a job in this field* (16% 'not at all' and 19% 'a small amount'). This may be because many such students are already strongly committed to this field and do not need the course to make up their mind one way or the other. Business students have more limited expectations, especially in terms of interest and excitement. It would seem likely that the other courses are currently taught in a more practical, hands-on manner.

Factors influencing choice of institution

Students were asked about the factors which had influenced them to enrol in their chosen institution rather than in another institution. Students were presented with a list of possible factors and were asked to respond to those factors which had some influence on their decision. The factors are listed in table 8 and the percentage of cases for each item shown. There were 8815 responses to all the factors for this question; that is, many students selected more than one factor.

Relevance, convenience and quality were the most prominent considerations. The most important consideration, by a wide margin, was course relevance; that is, that the institution *offered the course I wanted* (77%). Convenience considerations also rated highly. Accessibility to home and the time of day of course offerings were quite important. More than 50% of students reported *close to home* as a factor which influenced their enrolment and 43% reported the course timing as an influence. Cost of course was also an important factor, with 42% of students responding to the item *I could afford the costs.*

Table 8: Factors which influenced students to enrol in their chosen institution (expressed as percentages)

Factors which influenced choice of institution	%
Offered the course I wanted	77
Close to home	52
Course offered at a suitable time of day	45
I could afford the costs	42
Course offered opportunities for hands-on experience	39
Has a good reputation	36
Qualification is well regarded	35
Has a friendly atmosphere	34
Course starting date suitable	29
Course can be completed in a short time frame	28
Course recognised at another institution	27
I was offered a place	26
Easy access to public transport	24
Information provided about this course was easy to understand	22
Offered courses which are switched on to industry needs	22
Delivers a range of teaching methods, eg. open learning	18
Offered a broad range of courses	17
My employer sent me here	11
Guaranteed a job at the end of the course	10
My friends were coming here	9
There is disability access	3
Provides child-care facilities	2

Other important factors influencing choice of institution were concerned with quality, the practical experiences that courses offered, the reputation of institutions, the status of qualifications received and the atmosphere of institutions. That is, 39% of students responded to the item *course offered opportunities for hands-on experience*, 36% to this institution *has a good reputation*, 35% to *qualification is well regarded* and 34% to *friendly atmosphere*. These responses reveal the importance of ease of access from home, the reputation of institutions and their quality, paralleling the findings of James et al. (1999a) in their study of university undergraduates. They found that the course offered was the main consideration in students' choice of institution, and this was followed by ease of access to home, the institution's prestige, the campus surroundings and atmosphere, and the sense of personal fit. Campus facilities were relatively unimportant. James et al. (1999b), in a survey of rural and isolated school students, report that students who were considering enrolling in a TAFE course frequently mentioned the lower cost factor as an attraction compared with other tertiary courses.

Other convenience factors listed next in influence were: *course starting date suitable* (29%); and *course can be completed in a short time frame* (28%). To the factor, *I was offered a place*, only 26% of students responded, indicating that factors other than course acceptance are very important in students' decisions to enrol in certain institutions. *Easy access to public transport* was important for some students (24%) and 22% responded to the item, *information provided about this course was easy to understand* indicating that providers are producing information that is accessible to students. The fact that *courses are switched on to industry needs* and that institutes offer *the delivery of a range of teaching methods* are important influences (22% and 18% respectively) on enrolment at certain institutions. The other factors listed were of declining importance, with the provision of *child-care facilities* and *disability access* receiving very low response rates (2%). These services would only be applicable to a low percentage of the student population, although of considerable importance to that percentage.

The written comments concerning choice of current institution provided additional insights. Student comments confirmed that *close to home* was influential in the decision-making of many students: 'it was the only one near home'; 'it was the course I wanted close to home'; 'it was closest and I didn't have to travel far'; 'the main reason I chose to go to this TAFE was because it was the closest'. Discussions with students on site visits demonstrated that colleges which are strongly identified within the local community as an integral part of that community draw heavily on the local community for their clientele. Students interviewed in those colleges generally spoke of accessing the college because they lived in the area and 'so knew about it, so just looked into it [the field of study they were interested in]'. For some students living in rural areas, the opportunity to study at a local TAFE was critical. A student at a rural TAFE stated, 'I didn't want to have to leave home and go to Melbourne or Bendigo for further education. When this course was offered to me through VTAC [Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre] I was pleased that I could still keep my job, live at home and get further education without having to adjust too much'.

The need for a manageable course cost was also an important factor in student choice and was essential for one student, 'I wanted to work in the hospitality industry, and being on benefits, could not afford to pay full fees at "X". "Y" gave me the opportunity to gain my certificate and qualifications for virtually next to nothing. Without this course, I could not be studying for a better career'. Course cost was mentioned by students in the qualitative data several times as a reason for enrolling in a certain institution; for example, 'I was able to pay my course costs off in instalments'.

Students mentioned the importance of a college's reputation as an influence on their enrolment; for example, 'this college has an excellent reputation compared to other colleges offering my course' and 'it has a good reputation and offers lots of opportunities, being well known and close to restaurants'. The importance of a friendly, comfortable atmosphere, particularly for mature-age students, was emphasised by some: 'I found the easy, friendly atmosphere at the centre a perfect place to learn, it has a non-threatening environment, which for an older person is encouraging'; 'this is a lot more user-friendly to mature-age students, the only other one close by ... has a lot of kids just out of school which is very intimidating';

'friendly staff, and comfortable surroundings create a good working environment'. One student summed up these factors in her comment: 'I came here because this was the closest institution to home and it has a good reputation and the staff are really good and helpful'.

Several students stated that they were studying at their VET institution because they were offered a place there, although their first preference would have been elsewhere. Comments such as 'would accept my tertiary entrance rank' and 'my tertiary entrance rank wasn't good enough for anywhere else' were made.

Students who had considered other courses and institutions were asked to indicate factors which might have led them to reject these, thereby complementing the previous question. Students were presented with a list of possible factors and were asked to respond to those factors which had some influence on their decision. The factors are listed in table 9 and the percentage of cases for each factor shown.

Table 9: Factors which led students to reject other courses and other institutions (expressed as percentages)

Factors which influenced rejection of course or institution	%
I was not accepted for the course	34
The course was too costly	21
Access to the institution was difficult	14
It gave me bad vibes	11
The course was not offered	10
Information provided was not helpful	6
Class times were not offered (this should have read not suitable)	4
There were no child-care facilities	0

The number of responses to this question was small, only 368 responses compared with 8815 responses to the previous question asking students about factors which influenced their choice of current VET institution. It would seem that most students do not perceive themselves as having actively rejected an alternative institution. The process of choice may be perceived as a positive (preferring) action rather than a negative (rejecting) one. In any case, for these responses, similar considerations emerge to those on the previous question. The most important reason for students not enrolling in an institution was because of their non-acceptance into a course of their choice (34% of responses, 8% of sample). This was followed by course cost being restrictive (21% of responses, 5% of sample) and access to the institution being difficult (14% of responses, 3% of sample). The importance of a friendly atmosphere, as indicated in the previous question, is upheld in this question with 11% of responses (3% of sample) recording that *bad vibes* at an institution was a factor involved in rejection of enrolment there. The remaining factors recorded low responses, particularly the provision of child-care facilities, which supports the findings in the previous question indicating that for the majority of students this is not an important factor for them.

Personal characteristics of students

In order that some insight might be gained into the personalities of the people who enrol in VET courses, students were asked to indicate how much each one of a list of personal characteristics applied to themselves. The 13 characteristics and the 1447 responses to them expressed as percentages are shown in table 10.

Table 10: Personal characteristics—distribution of responses (expressed as percentages)

Characteristic	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
Hard working	1	4	25	39	31	4.0	0.9
Capable	1	5	25	39	31	4.0	0.9
Easy going	2	5	27	36	31	3.9	1.0
Happy	2	5	30	36	27	3.8	0.9
Practical	1	5	32	39	23	3.8	0.9
Persistent	2	8	34	33	23	3.7	1.0
Energetic	2	9	35	32	22	3.6	1.0
Successful	2	8	39	33	18	3.6	0.9
Confident	2	9	38	33	18	3.6	0.9
Intelligent	2	8	40	35	16	3.5	0.9
Organised	4	11	36	30	19	3.5	1.0
Physical	3	13	37	27	18	3.4	1.0
Creative	4	13	40	27	16	3.0	1.0

1 = Not at all 2 = A small amount 3 = A fair amount 4 = A large amount 5 = A huge amount

In view of the likelihood that responses to this item could be seriously inflated by a less than serious approach to answering it, the students appear to have been quite circumspect when they were evaluating themselves on such positive characteristics. The presence of responses across all categories suggests an honest approach. However, since all of the characteristics are positive, there may be a tendency here towards inflation; that is, towards over-representation of the positive end of the scale. On the other hand, the differences between the four fields of study are more or less as expected and this gives some credence to the data.

The highest rated characteristic was *hard working* (with a mean score of 4.0 and a modal response of 'a large amount'). The lowest rated characteristic was *creative* (3.0 and 'a fair amount'). Considering that many of these students were working as well as studying, and others had returned to study after a substantial absence from it, there is no doubt that they would be hard working and many would consider themselves capable. The high priority given to the term *easy going* suggests that most students felt that they did not get stressed and were tolerant of their environment.

The characteristics of *happy*, *persistent* and *energetic* showed a lesser degree of confidence, although the differences were only slight. *Successful*, *confident*, *intelligent*, *organised* and *physical* showed further decrease, but still with a mean in

the middle of 'a fair amount'. The lowest measure was *creative*, with a mean on the threshold between 'a small amount' and 'a fair amount'.

Table 11 shows the mean responses for each of the four fields of study. These results reflect the situation in which the mean responses were mainly within the middle measure of the scale, 'a fair amount', and a small number in 'a large amount'. Students in the business field considered themselves to be *hard working*, *easy going* and *capable* rather than *physical* and *creative* and *successful*, whereas in the engineering field they were *hard working* and *practical* and not so *organised* or *creative*. The health and community welfare group saw themselves as *easy going*, *happy* and *hard working*, although not so *creative* or *physical*. The results in tourism and hospitality showed a tendency towards being *easy going*, *hard working* and *happy* as opposed to *intelligent*, *physical* and *creative*. For almost every character, the business and engineering groups rated themselves lower than the other two groups, and the engineering responses had the lowest means or equal lowest with another in all but one characteristic, *practical*. The greatest difference between groups, for one characteristic was for *happy* with the lowest mean for engineering (3.5) and the highest for both health and community welfare and tourism and hospitality (4.0). The lowest overall mean was business on *physical* and engineering on *easy going*; and the highest overall mean for tourism and hospitality on *easy going*.

Table 11: Personal characteristics—comparison of means across fields of study

Characteristic	B	E	H	T
Capable	3.8	3.7	3.9	3.9
Confident	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.6
Creative	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.5
Easy going	3.8	3.7	4.0	4.1
Energetic	3.6	3.5	3.7	3.7
Happy	3.7	3.5	4.0	4.0
Hard working	3.9	3.9	4.0	4.0
Intelligent	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.5
Organised	3.6	3.3	3.5	3.6
Persistent	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.7
Physical	3.3	3.5	3.4	3.5
Practical	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.8
Successful	3.5	3.6	3.5	3.7

B = Business E = Engineering H = Health & community welfare T = Tourism & hospitality

Factor analysis of these personality characteristics (table 10) suggested that there were two identifiable factors which we have labelled **Personality** and **Occupation**. The strongest contributing characteristics to each factor are shown in table 12.

Table 12: Factor analysis of personal characteristics

Personality factor	Occupation factor
Easy going	Organised
Energetic	Hard working
Happy	Persistent
Confident	Intelligent
Creative	Practical
Capable	Successful
Physical	Capable
Successful	Physical

Profile plots were constructed for each factor in each field of study, comparing the age groups *under-20* and *20-and-over* and whether they were attending school or not in 1998. Although the results showed only slight variations between the various age and schooling groups, the trends were nevertheless interesting. The means for the two separate factors as well as when combined fell close to the middle of the scale; that is, in the middle of 'a fair amount' for all fields of study, but consistent differences emerge between students in the different fields of study.

Engineering students scored closer to the *successful/physical* end on the personality factor, especially those who were not at school in the previous year. Tourism and hospitality students scored towards the *easy going/energetic* end of the personality factor. The exception to this was the *under-20* group who were not at school in the previous year. The significance of this pattern becomes evident, not so much in its degree but in its consistency. An interesting sub-group is the *20-and-over* who were at school in the previous year. These are tightly bunched but their counterparts who were not at school in the previous year are the most diverse group.

Analysis of the occupation factor data produced similar patterns. These patterns serve to highlight that there are differences in the way people see themselves in terms of these personality and occupation traits. This and the slight but consistent differences between age groups and education history could also be significant for the way these people are targeted by institutions offering VET courses.

Students were also asked to indicate how much they liked doing particular activities. This was probably less subjective (more objective) than the personality ratings and therefore more reliable. The responses are shown in table 13. Overall, the strongest response was given to *working with people* followed closely by *helping people*, with the least popular being *making calculations*, *designing things* and *using computers*.

Table 13: Activities—distribution of percentage responses

Activity	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
Working with people	1	4	20	33	43	4.1	0.9
Helping people	2	6	23	34	35	3.9	1.0
Outdoor activities	4	10	24	30	32	3.8	1.1
Making things	4	15	29	28	24	3.5	1.1
Planning things	3	14	36	30	17	3.4	1.0
Reading books and magazines	6	17	30	26	21	3.4	1.2
Using computers	9	17	30	25	20	3.3	1.2
Designing things	8	20	32	22	18	3.2	1.2
Making calculations	3	26	35	18	8	2.8	1.1

1 = Not at all 2 = A small amount 3 = A fair amount 4 = A large amount 5 = A huge amount

When the results of this item are broken down according to the four fields of study, some differences are revealed (see table 14).

Health and community welfare students and tourism and hospitality students responded to the activity *working with people* at levels of 55% and 50% respectively. This was in contrast to the engineering and business students who responded to this activity at levels of 21% and 38% respectively. Similarly, responding to the activity *helping people*, health and community welfare students and tourism and hospitality students responded at levels of 55% and 38% respectively, which contrasted with 15% and 24% for engineering and business students. Engineering students responded most positively to *making things* and *designing things* at a level of 71% when the two highest levels of influence were combined, compared with the business, health and community welfare, and tourism and hospitality students who responded to these activities within a range of 36% and 52%. Business students expressed most interest in *using computers* with a response level of 62% combining the two highest levels of influence, compared with engineering, health and community welfare and tourism and hospitality students whose response rates varied between 36% and 43% for this activity. Health and community welfare students showed the greatest interest in *reading books and magazines* with a response of 62% in the two highest levels of interest, compared with 47% and 46% for tourism and hospitality students and business students respectively. The response from engineering students was 27%.

Factor analysis of this item revealed three factors, labeled *concrete*, *people* and *abstract*. The defining activities for each factor are shown in table 15.

Table 14: Enjoyment of activities—percentage responses by fields of study

Experiences	*Field of study*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
Working with people	B	0	4	25	33	38
	E	5	10	30	34	21
	H	0	1	12	32	55
	T	1	3	15	31	50
Helping people	B	2	6	31	38	24
	E	6	14	36	30	15
	H	0	1	11	34	55
	T	1	5	21	35	38
Outdoor activities	B	4	10	29	29	28
	E	4	7	19	34	36
	H	3	12	25	29	31
	T	5	9	24	28	33
Making things	B	5	18	32	25	20
	E	2	7	20	34	37
	H	6	18	31	34	37
	T	4	14	30	31	22
Planning things	B	3	11	31	32	24
	E	4	17	38	26	15
	H	2	12	38	33	15
	T	3	17	32	30	18
Reading books and magazines	B	4	14	36	27	19
	E	12	30	31	16	11
	H	4	11	24	30	32
	T	6	17	30	28	19
Using computers	B	1	9	28	30	32
	E	13	26	25	19	17
	H	12	18	32	25	13
	T	9	16	32	23	19
Designing things	B	11	22	29	23	16
	E	0	4	25	33	38
	H	11	20	33	21	15
	T	5	22	32	23	19
Making calculations	B	9	23	35	21	12
	E	12	18	42	17	11
	H	15	33	33	14	6
	T	14	29	34	20	4

1 = Not at all 2 = A small amount 3 = A fair amount 4 = A large amount 5 = A huge amount
B = Business E = Engineering H = Health & community welfare T = Tourism & hospitality

Table 15: Factor analysis of preferred activities

Concrete factor	People factor	Abstract factor
Designing things	Helping people	Using computers
Making things	Working with people	Reading books and magazines
Outdoor activities		
Planning things		

Profile plot analysis revealed that, for the concrete factor, there are differences between the two age groups as well as in and between the fields of study. All engineering students are positive on this factor with the more mature students even more so. Age and personality were subtle players in determining the types of activities enjoyed by students undertaking courses in these fields.

Educational and work aspirations of students

Students were asked to state the highest educational qualification they hoped to achieve within the next five years. Table 16 shows the responses to this item by fields of study.

Table 16: Highest educational qualification aspired to within the next five years (expressed as percentages by fields of study)

Qualification	B	E	H	T
Certificate level 1	1	4	0*	1
Certificate level 2	4	4	0*	3
Certificate level 3	9	20	5	14
Certificate level 4	13	21	12	17
Diploma	41	20	39	40
Bachelor degree	27	16	37	23
Other	7	14	7	3

*0 = negligible

B = Business E = Engineering H = Health & community welfare T = Tourism & hospitality

Overall, these figures indicate a remarkable degree of aspiration for further qualifications. The greatest amount of aspiration is for a diploma. The exception of this is engineering, where certificate 3, certificate 4 and diploma are about equally anticipated, suggesting a greater degree of expectation of no further studies beyond the apprenticeship. This was supported by interviews with students during the site visits. The other remarkable aspect of these figures is the high degree of aspiration for university undergraduate studies leading to a bachelor degree. Almost two in five students are so inclined in the health and community welfare field. This can be considered excellent in terms of perceived possibilities and breaking down of boundaries. On the other hand, it suggests that many of the vocational positions for which these students are ostensibly being trained are unlikely to be taken up, at least for long, by many of these students. In terms of the national training strategy, this means that much training must be failing to meet the expectations of carefully defined training profiles. Such profiles need to take more deliberate account of the destinations of students on completion of their awards.

Further insight is gained into these data by comparing the aspirations with the current enrolment of the students, as shown in table 17.

Table 17: Highest educational qualification aspired to within the next five years compared with level of current course

Academic aspiration	Level of current course			
	Certificate 1/2	Certificate 3	Certificate 4	Diploma
Certificate levels 1 & 2	10	6	2	1
Certificate level 3	20	19	5	1
Certificate level 4	20	20	24	3
Diploma	25	31	35	48
Bachelor degree	16	18	30	40
Other	9	7	5	8

The enthusiasm for further qualifications is related to the course the students are currently enrolled in. A large proportion of students in all course levels express a desire to extend their studies beyond their current level. It seems curious that some in certificate 3 and above believe that the highest qualification they will gain is actually below their existing enrolment. This could suggest that some students feel they will not achieve what they set out to do. However, this is also likely to result from the nested arrangement of some programs which would allow students to terminate their studies at the point of completion of a lower award.

Students were also asked to indicate the levels of responsibility they would like to achieve within the next ten years. The first choice, with results shown in table 18, was between *employee*, *self-employed*, *retired* and to specify any *other*.

Table 18: Levels of responsibility aspired to in employment (expressed as percentages by fields of study)

Position	B	E	H	T
Employee	56	43	67	53
Self-employed	39	49	26	41
Retired	3	7	4	3
Other	2	1	2	3

B = Business E = Engineering H = Health & community welfare T = Tourism & hospitality

While many respondents in all the fields saw the opportunity for self-employment, the responses were clearly affected by the opportunities available in each field. Engineers could plan to open a small business specialising in their particular trade, but in the health and community welfare field the greater likelihood is that the students would seek employment in hospitals, government agencies, care centres and similar establishments. The overall view is positive in that all who want to be employed envisage themselves as obtaining employment.

The second choice was to be selected from: *worker*, *supervisor*, *manager* and *other*. The responses are shown in table 19. In all fields except health and community

welfare, respondents aspire to management positions, especially for business and tourism and hospitality groups. For the health and community welfare group, the response is still strongly towards at least a supervisory role if not management. It appears that the students surveyed hold high hopes for their futures and probably perceive their current studies to be the early stages of this ten-year plan.

Table 19: Levels of responsibility aspired to in management (expressed as percentages by fields of study)

Position	B	E	H	T
Worker	10	25	31	9
Supervisor	24	31	33	25
Manager	61	40	30	64
Other	5	5	6	2

B = Business E = Engineering H = Health & community welfare T = Tourism & hospitality

Personal vignettes

Survey respondents were invited to write any comments about their education and career path which could be important in understanding their personal history: for example, changes of employment, disability, periods of unemployment, health, where they live. Many did not write anything in the space provided. However, those who did write something often did so in detail and provided some interesting personal vignettes which offer highlights on the main findings and insights on their personal experiences. The following sections follow the sequence of findings in the previous parts of this chapter.

Focus on jobs and qualifications

Getting a job was a major focus of many students, particularly amongst school leavers. Qualifications are a means to obtaining that job. The following comments amplify the earlier discussion but also illustrate how choice involves a mix of influences that differ from person to person.

> *I really haven't stepped out into the workforce as I only left school in 1998. I hope that this course helps me find a career in a dietary field. I really enjoy nutrition, so I hope this course helps me gain information and knowledge to help further my career & help me gain a job as dietary supervisor.*

> *After finishing my HSC I said to myself give it a break so I went to work. I basically worked in any industry you know of, but I was getting bored very quickly, so then I understood that in this country with all the opportunities you must get educated.*

> *With this course I hope to acquire enough skills to enable me to work in a position that I will enjoy and be successful at, so as to stay with the company for more than a year or 6 months. I want to obtain the experience to be able to manage my own business eventually.*

The main reason for me recommencing my education now is because prior to this I had been raising my children. It also seems to me that an education (higher education) is necessary to achieve a secure well-paid job. As a sole parent this is important to me. My education will hopefully give me the advantage of entering my chosen career with useful skills and knowledge.

I have chosen this course to help me gain computer experience and hopefully help me to get a good job at the end of the course, and help me to gain confidence.

I had not had a professional career for several years, so I needed up-to-date qualifications to re-enter the workforce. This course enables me to use my previous nursing background and use it with office skills to broaden my range of options.

To gain qualifications to get the chance to reach my ultimate job.

Varying patterns of work, study and employment were described. They illustrate the characteristic that many people change career, perhaps several times, throughout their working lives. Often these changes relate to the training opportunities and employment offers that they take advantage of as soon as they become available.

1996 completed Year 12 was working part-time in a bakery. 1997 then attended uni for a year, didn't like it. 1998 worked the next year part-time. 1999 gained an apprenticeship in motor mechanics (the current area of study).

In the past 13 years I have had a few different jobs and career changes. I believe this has given me a broad base to fall back on with the experiences I have obtained (now training as an apprentice motor mechanic).

I left school when I was 15, worked at KFC then didn't have any work for a few months. I then did voluntary work at an elderly home. Then quit after that after finding out about this course (Cert 4 Health & Community Welfare). I am currently doing this course and am working at 'Rays Tent City' on weekends for extra money.

Spent a year on exchange in Germany before finishing school. Started BM course but deferred after 6 months then worked for 2 1/2 years as a deli manager and didn't go back. After earning enough money decided to go back to study.

Since leaving school I have been to two universities without completing/excelling at the courses (2). I've been overseas and worked in London for a year. Since I've not got a piece of paper (Education Tertiary Cert Dip etc) my previous/current jobs have all been manual/boring in nature. It was time to change to an interesting career in fitness, and save my body from future aches/pains.

I left school at year 12 level in 1994. In 1995 I worked on a casual basis at a 7-11 convenience store. Mid 1996–Dec 1996 completed a Certificate in pre-

vocational engineering. Didn't like the work so I did nothing with it. Oct 1996–current, got a job at Dominos pizza as a driver simply for better working conditions. 1997 made a pact with a friend of mine to both go back to study. We both chose BSc. He was accepted I got denied and received offer into this course (Diploma of Recreation Fitness). 1998 started this course with no idea of what it was about. I have experience in the gym and this course helps expand my knowledge.

Focus on personal interest and aspiration

Personal interest and aspiration influenced many students in their enrolment. The following comments amplify the earlier discussion in this area.

The goal of obtaining **suitably rewarding, interesting and challenging employment** was mentioned by several students.

I used to want to be a teacher but the hospitality industry is exciting and I know I'll be happy working in the hospitality environment.

I would really love to work up north, tour guiding through the rainforests etc but I need a qualification first.

I am enrolled in this course to gain experience/knowledge to help get employment in the hospitality industry so I can reach my goal of being a flight attendant. I am also looking for an institution which offers language short classes to gain more qualifications which will help me in this industry.

I completed an Associate Diploma in Business and Travel and I was not successful in gaining employment in this field. I got a job in a field that was not challenging to me intellectually and I was not satisfied with the working conditions. These factors prompted me to enrol in this course.

This course comes twenty years too late. Career choices as a teenager were misguided and my sense of fulfillment in the workplace as a graphic artist was never realised. Lack of qualifications in other fields was limiting thus leading to lesser jobs. Here's hoping I achieve my goal! (in the field of health).

Change of career at 47 years from retail to nursing; wanted a career that was more worthwhile. It was time for a change and new direction. Also regrets about not completing my education when I was younger.

I have always worked in physically demanding jobs. These jobs have always been very damaging to our environment. I have also worked for some companies that I have very much resented helping them make a profit. During these periods of employment I have usually put my own health and safety at risk with no job security. My career has now addressed and rectified all of these issues (in the field of health).

Educated—The International School of Lae—Papua New Guinea. Been travelling since age 9—Europe, South Pacific, Asia and encountered hiccups

and inconveniences with flight bookings etc—so decided to try to make other people's holidays easy and smooth. Love to travel myself. Live in PNG—great tourist destination if managed and recognised properly. Hope to help develop PNG in future years to help people understand and enjoy our cultures and languages and customs.

Some people had not had a career path planned or perhaps events did not follow their plan and they were **searching for a direction in life**.

Many different jobs/skills in the past. Tried to get as much experience in different areas as possible to eliminate them and work out what I really wanted to do. Still looking.

Even those students who had just completed high school were able to provide some insight into their **plans and hopes** at a time when they are closing one phase of their lives and making decisions about where their lives might lead them next.

I have been at school more than 15 years of my life and I wanted a little rest so I didn't want to go to university for 4–6 years and waste more time on a subject I wasn't so sure about studying. Interests change so I wouldn't want to be tied down to a job that wasn't giving me any satisfaction

I have been studying through my whole life. At the moment I am 21, I have not been employed full time, just casual job when I was in Year 11 at high school. I am living in Armidale at the moment and I have been move to Armidale not long ago (10 months). I have been studying 1½ years of management course in Brisbane and I will be finished my business course this year.

Students expressed the appeal of study and/or qualifications for the contributions these can make to **personal fulfillment**. It is possible that the studying in itself might be so satisfying that some students remain students for most of their lives. The courses of study become the career, and the job simply provides the means to continue studying.

I enjoy different jobs. I can turn my hand to anything I put my mind to whether it is painting, fruit picking or office work. I believe that learning new things keeps me young and my brain active. After this course I would like to study welfare.

I seem to be discovering new things about myself all the time so whilst I know I want to be elsewhere in 10 years, I don't know where. I'm just taking my life bit by bit, gathering information as I go, it is always useful as I pass into each new phase.

Would like to study Human Resource which I like. Hopefully study it after this course. I am part time employed at a café and hotel ranging from 20–30 hours a week, sometimes more.

Education is very important and I really adore it.

For those who have been unemployed, or have been unsuccessful in courses or work, or had been uninformed of the possibilities early in their working lives, the sense of achievement and enjoyment in a vocationally oriented course can provide the **affirmation of self** which they seek.

> *It took approx 2 years to decide to take the step into taking on the commitment and gaining the confidence to move to a Diploma Course. Through the 'Return to Study' course and being introduced into the university life I gained a little more confidence and belief in myself that I could achieve my goal.*

Career change also featured strongly. Change was brought about by many different causes. People who were now looking for a different job, for whatever reason, realised the importance of retraining. Some cited redundancy as the cause for requiring training in a new job:

> *I wanted to upgrade my skills to obtain a better employment position for the future. I had been employed in local government and wanted to further my position, unfortunately I was made redundant, hence doing this course.*
>
> *Redundancy forced me to look for other avenues of employment—took the opportunity to do something I've always been interested in. Being employed for so long and then not having a job was a shock—the course has kept me active & going towards another area of employment.*
>
> *I changed to commercial cookery once I completed level four food studies in the hope of obtaining employment as food studies has very limited employment prospects.*
>
> *Mother of 3 boys, chef by trade. I don't want to work nights and weekends forever. Studied journalism but found I didn't like it. I believe I am a fairly giving person and might be well suited to social welfare.*
>
> *I started back studying here at the Gordon because I was unhappy in my job. I needed computer knowledge to get a better job. Doing this was a total change of career.*
>
> *After completing Cert 4 in childcare I wanted a change in career so decided to try office work as Goulburn College doesn't offer many other courses that interested me. Having three children I couldn't travel anywhere.*

Illness was sometimes a reason for switching careers. After having spent considerable time in the first career, a person could have thrust upon them circumstances requiring new parameters to be considered, perhaps a drastic change in career plans relating to different skills, even a different industry.

> *Working full time for a large organisation for approx 7 years then had to leave due to rare lung disease. I was off work for 2 years and decided to do some formal training to help me expand on developing the skills that I had acquired while working, so that I can re-enter the work force and have a much better chance of obtaining a position that I would enjoy.*

Due to injuries from work, I am undertaking a work retraining program so I will be able to go into another field of work suitable to my injuries.

1998 was an unlucky year for me as I was constantly ill and had chickenpox during my university exams. This meant I could not continue on in my course for the following semester, thus I deferred my studies. Then it was hard to start over again, so I have since deferred again, and decided to finish the TAFE studies I started. Health and personal problems have led me to where I am, though I now am quite happy doing what I'm doing. I figured it would be better to have at least 1 qualification rather than none...

Caring for others such as ill family members or young children caused many, usually women, to **put career plans on hold** until the issues were resolved. The resolve of some of these students to commence a course of training, the tenacity to complete it and the hoped-for reward of an enjoyable career are communicated in their comments.

Single parent, no support, no one to mind my children. Waited until they were old enough to look after themselves before I started the first step to the rest of my life. I have a casual position while studying full time.

When the youngest commenced infant school I decided to undertake a course to improve my chances of gaining a full-time job.

After having children and staying at home until they were school age, I would now like to have a career.

I am a single parent wishing to return to the work force on a part-time basis with an aim to reach supervisory levels in the next few years once my children are grown-up.

Immigration often necessitated a career change. For immigrants, their qualifications are not always recognised in this country, the industry might not exist here or family circumstances and customs could have changed from those of the homeland.

I was a primary teacher back to my country. Came up here not qualified teacher. I worked in a factory as process worker. And asked to worked in the office for some times. Then move to Geelong. Nothing to do at that time (I'm training) so I can work in an office environment.

In China I was a highly qualified doctor specialising in obstetrician and gynaecology. But after arriving in Australia I had 3 years period of unemployment history. I learnt an English very hard and enrolled in Cert 4 in Health at institution and want to help with current job updating skills.

TAFE has been recognised to be an **alternative means of gaining entry to university courses**. The practical nature of VET courses might provide valuable basis for the more theoretical approach at university.

My family has always been involved in mining. I have been in and around mining all my life and I hope to be a part of it for many years to come. TAFE is a stepping stone to get into Uni and achieve those goals.

Studies at this level at the institute enable me to gain the foundations of Mech Eng and will allow me to continue on to a degree level of engineering.

Acquiring or upgrading skills for current employment

Training while working was seen by some as beneficial, particularly in times when the continuity of employment is uncertain and **further training can enhance job retention or job opportunities**. These comments amplify the earlier discussion in this area.

Just recently I was retrenched from my position as programming assistant. However, one week later due to the fact I was undertaking the marketing course I was offered a position in marketing as marketing assistant.

Finished school in Year 10 & became a Dairy Farmer for 6 years and then moved into the Hospitality Industry. I then started completing several courses & moved my way up the management chain. Doing courses to further my skills, knowledge & career.

Other factors influencing enrolment

Various factors can influence enrolment in VET or act as barriers to enrolment. The following comments amplify the earlier discussion.

Location, especially for those in rural areas, was an important factor in the choice of course. Some had to make compromises to be able to complete the course of their choice but sometimes the course was compromised for location.

I moved to my current living address (Wagga) 12 months ago from a rural town due to employment. Since gaining employment here and settling into my new lifestyle I have been able to continue with study in the hospitality industry. My home town does not provide a learning centre (TAFE etc) for people who have left school. Therefore I'm happy to be making a start in gaining certificates etc to further my career.

Choosing a college was difficult to decide on because the closest TAFE was still 20–30 minute drive & the days & hours were long, so I have to catch a train to Brisbane everyday so I can attend a well known college. There is a local TAFE located one block from me, but they don't offer any courses of interest to me.

I realised a Year 12 certificate qualified me to work at McDonalds full time so I realised I needed stability to back me up. I want to be a nurse. I attended USQ briefly however, I was homesick. I didn't get a high enough OP to do nursing n Brisbane so I'm doing a people-related course to gain skills in

communication to better myself. (Diploma of Applied Science, Community and Human Services).

Flexible delivery options offered by many VET institutions enable students to enrol in courses that suit their individual needs. Courses may be offered during the daytime or evening, for shorter or longer sequences, in different locations and by distance education.

I started nursing at 25 years of age. Having children changed my direction. Now they have grown and left I felt I would like to get back into the industry. I have been cleaning in a hotel for 13 years and I feel I need to move on. The opportunity to study at home and still keep working to pay the bills appealed to me so study through TAFE became my pathway.

Study and work hours need to be flexible.

Some students wrote of the **difficult circumstances and barriers** they faced in their attempts to seek further education in VET, while others expressed very positive feelings about their future.

Studying can cause a short term of unemployment & this gives me a lot of pressure & stress especially from my mum. She expects me to drop this course in order to get a job immediately to support the family. I sometimes feel really stressed out & have thought of many times of dropping out however I don't like to give up easily.

I would like more attention be given to work experience opportunities, especially for those who are mature age, or have been a sole parent, and have now commenced studies. It appears that more opportunities for traineeships are given to those 24 or under, but those who are no longer deemed to be sole parents (children over 16) need to be considered in traineeship projects in TAFE, so that they too can join the ranks of the employed.

Summary comment

The personal vignettes of these students are a strong reminder of **the many choices and confusions** facing those aspiring to education and a career. Many have not been able to make decisions about their futures because they lack either the vision to see the direction they want to go or where it may lead, or, alternatively, the information they need is not easy for them to access. **Appropriately prepared counselling services, in schools, VET institutions or as a public service could help fill this void**. Students could make choices which were more informed about the possibilities for the future, the direction courses would take them and the decisions they need to make along the way. Problems they perceive might be seen not to exist or could be alleviated by appropriate counselling services.

4 Site visits

Background

Site visits were conducted at 11 institutions. One purpose of the site visits was to explore in greater depth some of the issues identified in the student survey. Another purpose was to obtain viewpoints on student choice from staff working in these institutions. Information on the institution was collected from brochures and advertising material and semi-structured interviews were conducted with various groups of staff and students. Sites were chosen to be broadly representative of a range of contrasting institutions and courses and to provide illustrative insights on the issues.

Sample

The parameters used in selecting the sites were:

- 3 cases in each of the 4 fields of study
- 2 from capital city
- 2 from regional and rural centres
- three eastern mainland States
- willingness to participate
- fields of study balanced across States
- several contrasting cases
- sites selected from those in survey
- sites selected for their illustrative value

These parameters were essentially satisfied. Some modifications were necessary because some institutions were unable to participate and replacements with similar characteristics were in some cases difficult to locate (for example, private providers in some States). The final sample is shown in appendix 8 and represents a wide diversity of institutional types and regions and provides an overall balance of different contexts in which institutions operate and students make their choices. There were 11 sites, with three in New South Wales, three in Victoria and five in Queensland.

Groups interviewed

The target groups for interviews were:

- the institute director or deputy director and other management personnel
- program directors, teachers and trainers
- students
- careers advisers, counsellors, information officers
- employers using the services of the institution

The questions for each of the target groups were devised to be pertinent to the knowledge, interests and capabilities of the group. Administrators were asked about matters of strategic development and planning, whereas teachers were asked questions concerning the types of students in their courses. Student discussions focussed on the personal choices they had made and the degree to which courses met their expectation. Advisory staff were asked about career guidance and student knowledge of courses and career options. Employers were questioned about their reasons for choosing a particular institution as their training provider. The interview schedule is shown in appendix 9.

Each institution approached for a site visit was asked to provide the contact with an employer who used their services and who would be willing to participate in the interviews. All institutions had the strongest relationships with employers in the engineering field of study, originating from the links developed through the apprenticeship system, and all but one employer nominated by the training providers were in the engineering field. Employers interviewed are listed in appendix 10.

Analysis

The transcripts of interviews were summarised under major headings developed from the interview questions. This was an iterative process and a set of categories was derived and tested over a number of interviews to see whether these categories offered the best way of summarising the data. The original transcripts were revisited as a source of quotations to substantiate the findings. In addition to the categories derived from the interview questions, study of the interviews revealed other important issues. Where an issue was mentioned very frequently across institutions, additional categories were created to encompass these topics. An example of this is the 'status of VET'.

The interviews with institute directors and other personnel with knowledge at the strategic level focussed on how institutions make course selections, how they respond to competition, marketing strategies and their interaction with employers. This led to discussion about the training market and the government's role in this. Interviews with program directors and teachers focussed on who their students are and whether there is a fit between the individual student and the course in which the student is

enrolled. For example, do teachers encounter problems with student choice and are students well informed about the course. Student interviews explored how students make their decision to enrol in the course and what they are hoping to achieve by taking the course. Interviews with careers advisors, counsellors and information officers centred on the services they provide to students and their experiences of how aware students are of their training and career options. The employers were asked to comment on how they made the decision to use the services of their training provider and what they considered to be the most important features of the training program that the provider offered.

The final categories to emerge from the analysis were:

- how institutions make course selections
- provider response to competition in the training market
- marketing strategies of providers
- student compatibility with courses
- why people choose to enrol in VET programs
- employer choice of training provider
- status of VET
- support for training by employers
- collaboration

Findings

How institutions make course selections

The influence of history and geography

The profile of an institution reflects the geography and history of a region, and the administrators surveyed often spoke of the influence of history on their strategic planning in terms of courses offered. Expertise, built up over long periods of time, is not readily abandoned, and providers will consider, to some extent, their profile in terms of supply. One institute in Victoria described the field of accounting as, 'one of the grand survivors here for reasons we are not sure of, apart from the fact that ... we have teacher expertise in that area and they have managed to maintain it very successfully'. Another institute in Victoria has continued with courses in the field of engineering because the history of the region was based on large manufacturing industries. These have mostly disappeared now, but decisions have been made to utilise the resources and expertise in the field based on strategic location and manufacturing areas being accessible. Past experience was described by one administrator as being the basis for 'what profile you are going to develop and you put

in at the margin a range of new trends, dictated by the industry profile'. The history of TAFE as a training provider was frequently mentioned in relation to prospective students 'knowing about TAFE' and the relationships between TAFE and industry which have been built up over many years.

One institute, in a developing regional area, described their course offerings as 'trying to mirror the community'. This provider had moved away from offering courses that were indistinguishable from the products offered by institutes elsewhere and was diversifying and specialising so that the principal interests of employment and development in the region were mirrored in the program offerings. Input from industry training advisory bodies (ITABs), the regional economic development board, representatives of the major industries in the region, local members of parliament and institute staff was integral to the decision-making process for course offerings. This institute had an employment orientation to all offerings, although they were fulfilling their State Government's social justice agenda, and offering general education programs for young people alienated by the school system. A capital city TAFE institute also focusses on their regional area in their strategic plan, commenting 'we are not going to spend money trying to take on the world', which is in contrast to another city institute in the same State which promoted themselves as being the largest provider of education offering the biggest variety of courses.

Some institutes are known as key centres and are the only centres of provision for some courses, particularly in the field of engineering where the set-up costs are very high. One metropolitan TAFE in Queensland is the key centre for auto-electrical and armature winding, and in Sydney, an institute is the key centre for forging. This means that students from those States, and even interstate, will have to attend the key centre for training in certain fields. These institutes have guaranteed enrolments as long as they maintain a quality training provision and the industries they service remain viable. If such centres build up a good reputation for the services they provide in one area of training, there are likely to be benefits in other areas of training as a provider's reputation is influential in a user's choice of institution.

Move from supply to demand-driven culture

TAFE administrators frequently stated that one of their key strategic directions was to move from a supply-driven culture to a demand-driven culture. The focus of training has moved from being product-centred to being responsive and customer-focussed. Training providers use market research data to analyse changes in job patterns and changes in industry patterns in order to respond to market demand. For example, one city institute conducted research of their institute's catchment area and changing demographics in order to identify the future areas of demand for training. With knowledge of the areas of decline and the areas of growth, the institute is repositioning itself to place resources in the areas of future demand.

In some cases governments act as interpreters of the market and allocate funding accordingly. Providers have to interpret planning guidelines of State Governments in order to fit in with government training plans and receive the funding that is offered. For example, one State has a resource priorities document which outlines the funding strategies that the government will be using for training, and providers are aware that

they will need to respond to these priorities. As expressed by one institute director, governments might indicate, for example, that 'we (the government) want to buy multi-media, IT, aged care, we don't want to buy old-fashioned art, we don't really want to buy child-care'. This provider commented that 'the government wants to pour money into aged care so we need to look at how we can start positioning staff and how they can position themselves to meet the demand that we're going to get for aged care'. With such information, providers are looking at how they can place themselves in order to respond to market demand. These kinds of changes in demands have serious implications for deployment, retraining and possibly redundancy.

Providers are constantly balancing their course offerings in response to consumer demand in order to remain financially viable, and expertise is directed at adjusting to the market. Often the market is read correctly, but sometimes a predicted market does not develop as anticipated and programs have to be disbanded. An example of this is a sport and fitness program at a New South Wales metropolitan institute. It was anticipated that this would be a growth area for the general student market, but after some years it was recognised that it was not successful and could not be sustained. Strategic planning also involves knowing when a market is declining. Two institutes have found that in the area of real estate, where the full range of courses has been offered for some years, current demand is only for management level and lower office level training with no demand for courses in the middle and they have had to adjust their programs accordingly.

State forecasting of trends through 3–5 year projections, while useful for government funding allocation, may not reflect accurately what is happening at the local level of market demand. In one region, the call for the reduction in childcare training was not mirrored locally and there was still a high demand for childcare courses, which was followed by employment outcomes. Where courses are offered according to the immediate needs of the market, these may be offered for only a short period of time and only until the market need is satisfied: for example, 'user pays' computer courses (until these skills are more general and more naturally acquired), a security course (now that it is a legal requirement for all security officers to be licensed), justice of the peace courses (until the demand within a local community is satisfied) or a recognition course in the field of nursing (now that everyone working in nursing homes or with disabled people must have a qualification).

One administrator felt that a problem with trying to satisfy as much of the market as possible is that institutions do not develop as centres of excellence. Another commented, 'contestable funding and a competitive pricing structure does not encourage paying for teaching excellence'.

Providers' response to competition in the training market

Providers of training are in a highly competitive market for funds from both government and commercial sources. In the commercial sector, providers work closely with industry and employers in order to build relationships that are ongoing. As one institute administrator stated, 'our strategy is for repeat business because it's easier to keep someone than go and chase another client'. At this institute, there is a focus on developing and maintaining relationships with enterprises and industry. For

example, enterprises use the institute's facilities to run their own in-service programs, which not only helps to develop the relationship between training provider and clients but also has the benefit of allowing the institute's teachers to attend programs and keep abreast of current knowledge.

Institutions have full-time consultants marketing the services of their organisations in industry and the networking of teaching staff with employer groups is very important for the contacts that this creates. Employers also value ongoing relationships with training providers. One employer in the engineering field described the value of such a relationship in these terms: 'We try and develop a relationship over twelve months, or two or two and a half years to try and get some continuity and to start getting some linkages between programs. It's all very well training in one particular area, but if you get someone else to come and deliver and the terminology is a bit different, you start to get confusion. Having some consistency is important'.

Keeping abreast of industry trends enhances the opportunity of being an enterprise's chosen training provider. Employers are looking for providers with expertise in their industry. Providers are aware of this need and they aim to be informed about what is occurring in the industries they service in order to maintain their credibility. During the site visits, many instances of teachers being released to enterprises to enable them to gain current knowledge of the industries in which they teach were described. A hospitality teacher gave the following example. The Sheraton hotel chain would want training providers with 5-star hotel backgrounds and these teachers would need to return to the industry from time to time to maintain their currency. Teachers in the engineering field at one TAFE institute are released back into industry for periods of up to six months, in order to keep up to date with technology.

TAFEs frequently state that they can't compete on price with other private providers 'so we try and compete on quality and infrastructure and flexibility'. All the TAFE institutions visited were confident that in the long term, quality delivery, the infrastructure TAFE provides, and flexibility of delivery will ensure TAFE's survival. In addition, TAFEs offer support services for students in the form of literacy help, counselling and 'how to study' courses. It was felt that a few private providers were not providing quality training and some of the competition would disappear in time. At some TAFEs, teaching staff had noticed a drift back to TAFE training from private providers. Students in a regional town in New South Wales had asked their local TAFE institute to take over their course from a private provider because they were dissatisfied with the training being delivered. One TAFE director commented on the benefits of being customer service-focussed and providing a quality product, in this way: 'The lived experiences that our clients get is what makes them want to come back. The lived experience is far, far, more powerful than anything which they read'.

However, despite these positive experiences, some TAFEs are experiencing challenges in some areas competing with private providers and other TAFE colleges. TAFE campuses, operating under the umbrella of an institute, experience difficulties in responding to customer need when in competition with private providers because of their lack of autonomy and slow reaction time once a need for a course is recognised. In a regional centre, in the field of business, there are problems because TAFE is still perceived as having a trade focus and private providers are perceived as having a

more professional image in the business area. Some of the large car companies, such as Mazda, Ford and Toyota, have become registered training organisations and are delivering training themselves, including apprenticeship training. Ford has its own satellite training system to train their technicians and this will expand into the apprenticeship area. Training is delivered from Melbourne throughout Australia. One employer interviewed felt that he was receiving a more complete service from his private training provider than he would from his local TAFE institute. He valued in-house training, the flexible hours and the assurance that all the training would be face-to-face, with the training provider on-site for the contracted hours of training. He also valued the responsiveness of the provider to the developing needs of the employees being trained and the needs of the workplace. One TAFE college in a capital city was experiencing most competition in the field of tourism and hospitality from other TAFE institutes in that city. Where institutes are offering the same programs, the choice for students often comes down to the availability of public transport in the form of bus or train services.

Some TAFEs in Victoria are reported to be facing a financial crisis (Thorp 1999) because of underfunding and 'the damaging effect of excessive competition'. Some have tendered to provide courses at low costs per student contact hour in order to obtain funds, but realistically cannot deliver training at those prices.

Where TAFEs are losing students as a result of competition from other providers, faculties are developing creative courses to compensate for the decline in student numbers in some areas. In response to industry trends and individual student needs, where a gap in training is recognised, faculty staff are putting together new courses. For example, courses in sales and management as an addition to courses in the trade areas, and a 'resort hopping' course which includes some elements of travel, childcare, food and beverage and cookery. This will equip young people for employment at holiday resorts and possibly give them an edge over untrained workers. A regional institute is working towards increasing enrolments in the hospitality field of training by promoting the concept of regional cuisine within the hospitality industry in the area. It is hoped that this promotion will increase the tourist trade within the district and the need for trained personnel in the hospitality industry. Focussing on niche areas of training is another way training providers can capture a market that other people aren't serving. One niche market described during interviews is in the area of LP gas, natural gas and alternative fuels, another is records management on-line and in a developing regional centre, sports and recreation programs. By specialising in such courses, institutes are securing students in often developing fields. Overseas markets are also an area in which all the TAFE institutes in the study were conducting programs. Courses are being delivered in Indonesia, Iryan Jaya, New Zealand, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong.

While some TAFE personnel saw the internet as providing opportunities for expanding their student base, some administrators thought the competition for training on the internet could present a problem: 'A danger for us is the possibility of being gazumped by what is flooding in over the internet. There is so much training available now, particularly in America'.

One employer saw opportunities for training providers that were not being fulfilled. He thought that providers could initiate training on worksites by evaluating the needs of an employer rather than relying on employers to tell the training provider their needs. He described his thoughts in this way: 'The identification of training needs (in companies) is not all that great so I think the college coming out and starting to turn production needs into training needs, and trying to see that connection [in order] to say, we can develop something here for you. I think there's more opportunity there and I don't see that being taken up by anybody. Most people are fronting up and using the "we've got this good pneumatics training, do you need any?" approach. Rather than, "you've got this productivity improvement need, we've got some training that might help you with that"'.

Marketing strategies of providers

There are different client groups and different products for each group which have to be accommodated in any marketing plan. Clients include individual subscribers, school leavers, employer groups and enterprises.

Staff in some institutions are very proactive in marketing. One institute produces publications, aimed at an audience of Year 12 students, which go into every public and private school in their region. These publications present case studies of students who have studied at TAFE and in this way students are exposed to the opportunities VET provides. Information about coming events and addresses of on-line sites related to VET and employment are also provided. This institute makes sure that 'we're out there selling TAFE at every panel we're on, so that people will consider TAFE and see its benefits'. Another selling point that TAFE institutes promote is the services they provide outside course delivery, such as free career guidance and counselling services. Providers use mail-outs, published materials in the form of handbooks and brochures, newspaper, radio and TV advertisements and open days to advise clients of future programs and the services they provide. But all these forms of advertising are considered less successful than direct contact with potential clients, although local newspaper advertisements were mentioned on several occasions as being effective for reaching young people. One engineering program director commented that marketing has been an area he has had to develop: 'I go out to lots of schools and in the evenings I speak at schools. We take photos of successful students ... we get publicity in the local newspapers and involve the local politicians, industry groups and parent groups. Schools and students have written reports and they are our best ambassadors'. In the trades areas, where there is a long history of engagement with TAFE, entry into most trade courses is often by word of mouth through relations or friends: 'The majority of apprentices come through uncle Bill's sons, cousins, Uncle Fred or a previous apprentice'.

Where providers have very successful students, they ensure that those students are given a high profile and they push their successes in the name of the organisation that has trained them. A TAFE institute which has a high profile fashion course, and students who have won awards overseas and nationally, will 'make sure that the world out there knows ... and we push those things forward so that they stick in peoples' minds'.

Since the most effective marketing strategy has proved to be direct contact with potential clients, all providers had personnel working at the school and enterprise level who were often referred to as training consultants. Direct contact when followed by quality work and word of mouth follow-on was considered the most effective means of marketing. One director described this as 'now the best form of advertising is to offer a good quality course and by word of mouth it gets around'. He further suggested that students would 'go to that institute [because] they help you and they'll help you get a job in the end'. Another thought it was vital 'that the students exiting from the program have a positive image [since] they are our main sales point and much of the current publicity would gear around them'.

Training providers in all fields in this study commented on their networking with industry groups, employer groups, professional associations and ITABs. This was not only to keep abreast with current directions but also to ensure their individual organisations would be considered when decisions about choice of training provider were made by people within those networks. One manager at a TAFE institute commented that many opportunities for the institute had developed through such networking.

Student compatibility with courses

Teachers and program directors in all fields of study find that the majority of students in VET courses have made considered choices about their courses and are training to get skills and a vocational qualification. A counsellor's experience was: 'When students come in they generally have some idea about what they want to do. The more mature person definitely has thought more carefully about it than the recent school leaver. The recent school leaver is up against parental expectations and family traditions but as they get older they determine for themselves'.

In engineering, teachers commented that the fit between students and courses is usually very high because by the time students enrol in the field of engineering they have worked out that it is their area of interest. This confirms the findings of the survey where engineering students were the least likely group to be taking their course to 'help me decide if I want a job in this field'. In contrast, one hospitality teacher felt that a lot of young people 'don't know what they want to do and they fall into hospitality by accident ... so the course does help them decide what they want to do and gain some skills'. This was again supported by the survey as tourism and hospitality students were the group most likely to report that enrolment in this field of study would 'help me decide if I want a job in this field'.

Although teaching staff felt that there is a fit between the majority of students and their choice of course, they were concerned for those individuals who they felt were enrolled inappropriately. Counsellors and program managers and teachers across institutes spoke of groups of young people who enrol in VET programs without any clear sense of purpose or direction, or knowledge of the commitment needed to participate in a TAFE program. The following groups were described:

- Some students enrol in a full-time VET program in order to receive the youth allowance. Some of these students were described as being in a course because

they 'had to be' and the drop-out rate was fairly high. These drop-outs occur for a variety of reasons: there may have been inadequate support for these students and they could not cope with the extent of the work involved; they might not have been interested in the course; or social issues may have focussed the students' lives elsewhere.

- Some students who have just left school think TAFE is going to be a breeze. However, in the first half of the year, when they realise this is not so and they have to turn up five days a week and be in a class for two hours at a time with only short breaks, there is a substantial drop-out. This was frequently mentioned by hospitality teachers who indicated that students who enrol in hospitality courses without knowledge of the reality of the industry often drop out when they realise the extent of the hours and the low pay.

- Some students enrol in semester one because mum and dad say they are not going to sit at home. These students often do not know what they want to do and they enrol in a course with very little consideration of what they are doing.

- In second semester, students enrol who have made no decisions about what they really want to do. They leave school with hopes of walking into a job but when this does not happen they enrol at TAFE in order to be doing something. James et al. (1999) reported similar findings amongst senior secondary school students. They found the lack of available jobs was the reason why some students, particularly in rural areas, stayed at school.

- Some students enrol in courses until a job comes up and then they leave to work. When the work finishes or if it is found to be unsatisfactory, they drop back into training and this may happen several times. A program director in business commented: 'So although we like to think that TAFE is to provide a path for vocational study and perhaps a complete qualification, we have to accept that some students will leave when a job is offered'.

Amongst these groups of students, some have little motivation to be in the course in which they were enrolled, so what would need to happen to have more of these students actively engaged in some sort of vocational training? One teacher thought that it would be helpful for students who were undecided about what they wanted to do 'if they had a month at TAFE where they could have a taster of everything around the college. For students who genuinely don't want to go on to Years 11 and 12, it's a difficult choice because they are usually only just 16'.

It is not only school leavers involved in VET who have may have difficulties in adjusting to their courses. McInnis and James (1995), in a study of the initial experiences of Australian university undergraduates, found that just over a third of school leavers who had enrolled in a university course said that they were not ready to choose a university course and 45% of them believed that the standard at university was higher than they had expected.

Providers were concerned for those young people who had dropped out of the school system and were having difficulty finding a place for themselves in the world of work or training. One institute director felt that the training market had driven providers to

focus on providing specific skills training rather than a broadly based education and to focus on the short term rather than the long term as funding follows the development of very specific skills. 'It's probably driven us away from the very thing that our students are crying out for most, which is a sense of who they are and where they are and what it all means'. Some industries were seen to be demanding successful completion of Year 12 subjects, whereas some students who had lower levels of education, with the right support, may well be suited to some of the trades areas. In the community services area one administrator commented, 'I realise that a lot of those national training packages have a Year 12 entry and I'm thinking, here's VET wiping out Year 10 and 11 school leavers'.

TAFE counsellors consistently stated that, generally, students are not aware of the course options available to them or of the pathways that they can take from certificate level courses through to university entrance. Information is an issue, and counsellors found that a lot of potential students had large gaps in the information they had. People generally did not have good research skills and often made poor choices about careers because of inadequate information. A guidance officer commented: 'People don't always make good choices, they don't have the research skills. There will be people at Centrelink with TAFE qualifications who are still in the unemployment line because the qualification they have is not in an area of growth or they are not prepared to travel or move'. Amongst applicants to university, James et al. (1999a) reported that university applicants generally 'base their decisions on quite limited, subjective information … their decisions often convincingly demonstrate that tertiary decision-making is not always a logical, informed process'. Counsellors were concerned about attrition rates at TAFEs and wanted to help students make knowledgeable choices. The well-informed people were considered to be atypical students, and they usually had good support from a range of people: peers, friends, school teachers and role models in the family.

It is not only school leavers that have inadequate information about VET but also mature-age people. The positive aspects of TAFE as a place to gain entry into the world of study are not realised. Counsellors stated that self-doubt amongst potential students was one of the main issues facing people trying to make choices about VET programs, and mature-age students are often anxious about re-entering education. The fact that TAFE can provide an opportunity for people to develop confidence in themselves by some form of personal achievement is not recognised.

Counsellors felt that young people are often pressured into making decisions, and the students who drop out are the ones who have not made considered choices and have not sought advice. Conversely, some young people have very strong ideas about what they want to do and 'they tend to get focussed on one very small job area', often to their disadvantage, because they have not considered the job market or given consideration to other options. James et al. (1999a) found that first year university students have problems with transition to university from school and some of this appears to be related to an inappropriate choice of course and/or institution. One-third of first-year students believed with hindsight that they were not ready to choose a university course during their final school year. An English study of attrition rates amongst undergraduates linked non-completion with poor advice and decisions on courses and institutions (Yorke 1999 cited in James et al. 1999a).

Counsellors reported that they often have to undo the effects of misinformation. Ideas about requirements for certain courses may be incorrect and the standards needed to achieve qualifications may not be realised. For example, because of TAFE's relatively open access policy, some students think that enrolling in a TAFE course and attending classes will inevitably lead to the award of a qualification, irrespective of the performance. Also, perceptions of the work which qualifications lead to is sometimes inaccurate. For example, a childcare course will not enable someone to work in a school.

With counselling of some kind initially, it appeared that people were maintained in their courses and the courses were appropriate, at least in terms of a stepping stone into some future program or career area. The aim of counsellors was to give students an exposure to different options within different fields and to help students move toward their goals, while keeping as many doors open as possible. Counsellors hoped that they would be able to help people explore the world of work, inform people of the anticipated growth areas in the labour market and assist them in their career decision-making.

Why people choose to enrol in VET programs

The information from the on-site interviews, from program directors, teachers and students which focussed on why people enrol in VET programs expands on the data in the questionnaire. The interview discussions tended to focus on how courses help in the development of skills to gain some qualification for personal and future aspirations rather than for current employment. This is not surprising since only 11% of students reported that their employer had required them to enrol, and the majority of these students would not have been making a choice about their course of study since it was integral to their work.

Preparing for the future

Many students, who work full time during the day, are looking for extra qualifications or extra protection in the future as the market place changes. Others leave work to take on full-time study to give themselves more opportunities in the future within their industries. In business, one teacher had observed of her night class students who were mainly in full-time work that 'most are making strategic decisions of their own about what they would like to study and some of it is opportunistic. They hope it will position them better in the job market ... they're gathering ammunition to leap into something else. People seem to be not so frightened of change, getting into another job'. An employed student described reasons for enrolling in a business course as: 'I am studying for personal satisfaction and to keep myself marketable and my brain active'. Similarly, in engineering a teacher stated: 'People are doing modules for their own development. For example, someone working in hydraulics comes to do welding to get some experience in that area. People are opening up all avenues so that if one employment closes down they've got a chance of doing something else ... People are thinking, any more skills I can get, I'll get. One day I might need them'. Some people consider a course for the variety of training that it involves, thus positioning themselves to take advantage of a range of options. Other students, particularly mature-age women, are participating in VET courses, mainly in the fields of business

and tourism and hospitality, in order to develop skills to enable them to return to the workforce.

Establishing a new career direction

In all fields of study it was mentioned that some people enrol in courses in order to establish a new career direction. Sometimes people on workers' compensation have to be retrained. Others are retrenched and choose to make a complete change of career. For example, two Telecom workers in a country area who enrolled in commercial cookery have obtained apprenticeships. Younger men who have gone into trades areas may decide, 'I don't want to be doing this for the rest of my life'; it may be a high-risk job and they look for a new direction in a line of work which is not so physically demanding. Chefs might look for a job that is less pressured and with more sociable hours, nurses look for office work when they cannot do the heavy work involved with nursing any more and people leaving the army are often looking to develop new skills. Other people in their 30s and 40s, who left school when they were young and accessed a job without much thought, are feeling they have the ability to do more with their lives so they are retraining. A counsellor commented that changes in career direction are becoming more common today. People are considering options and job changing is becoming part of the employment culture, whereas previously people were suspected of being not very reliable or stable if they changed jobs.

For self-development

People, who have may experienced learning difficulties and drifted out of education, and been unemployed or underemployed, are coming back to VET feeling they want to achieve something. A counsellor at a regional TAFE institute described the issue of self-affirmation in these terms: 'I think a large number of people come back to TAFE because of their self-esteem. They haven't been successful in their lives, they've either had bad marriages, they've never been able to hold down a very good job, they've had a long history of unemployment and for these people it's more than just finding a job. It's about finding themselves as a person and believing that they can do something with their lives ... There are a lot of people who are really desperate, economically, socially and also in terms of their relationships and if they can find a place in TAFE and be successful it can be the start of success for them. And I've seen that time and time again. People for whom TAFE has turned their lives around ... I think TAFE has a real social role to play in helping people repair their lives and find a new direction'. In rural areas VET training may have a social role to play as described by one student in the field of health: 'I lead an isolated life in the country and now have a social interaction being a student'.

Availability of flexible delivery

For some students the ability to fast-track their studies can be very appealing. Mature-age students who are making a career change are usually very keen to complete their qualifications and experienced employees requiring qualifications in their area of work want to achieve this in a short time frame and with minimum interruption to their job. Learning materials are often delivered in flexible mode and students only attend the institution of their enrolment for practical aspects of a course and for

assessment. Providers felt that in order to compete successfully for students they must consider a variety of delivery modes of training. In the field of business, one institute director commented that the difficulty for most people who are working and want to participate in training is that they have a shortage of time. He saw a need for training to be delivered in a more condensed way but in different modes. Delivering on CD-ROM and the web has its place, but it is not appropriate for everyone as it does not fit the way some people learn. Face-to-face teaching is necessary, and compromises have to be found between the time it takes for students to complete a course and the delivery of training in a mode suitable to each individual.

Location and cost factors

During site interviews, TAFE personnel stated that some students would only consider enrolling in the closest institution to home and will then find a course there, but others would travel great distances in order to enrol in the course of their choice. Some students interviewed stated that they would look at the courses on offer in their local institution and would then decide which course they would enrol in. The accessibility of a local training provider was an important influence on student choice of course. This expands on the data in the questionnaire, which indicates more than half the students surveyed rated 'close to home' as a factor which influences enrolment with a certain training provider.

In rural areas there may be only one provider of training, and potential students have no choice of training if they do not want to move away. Choices for students in small centres are restricted, and the idea of taking on some full-time study is a huge leap for some because that involves moving to a bigger town. In order to provide some experience of training in small country towns, one regional TAFE institute offers a short module in hospitality as a taster course which provides some incentive for people to consider training and possibly the motivation to move to a larger town.

Course cost was also an important consideration for students, and a hospitality teacher thought that cost was more important than the quality of the course for a lot of young people. Young people enrol in hospitality to get a qualification which will enable them to work and they are not really concerned about the quality of the course. This teacher felt that in order to reduce costs and be more competitive in the training market, training providers trim down face-to-face teaching hours which results in a lower-quality outcome but might maintain student numbers.

Guarantee of work at the end of the course

A job offered at the end of the course can be an incentive for people to enrol with a certain training provider, but, as one hospitality teacher pointed out, the job may not always be as it seems. Some of the jobs offered by a private provider in the hospitality industry are overseas and to take up that employment involves the cost of an air ticket. However, a private provider visited in the engineering industry had built up a reputation amongst local people of being able to get people into jobs and this was a reason for some students enrolling at that institution. Some TAFEs in different States are working toward having job placement officers in their institutions and the premier

of New South Wales has suggested that TAFE should have this sort of facility within all of its institutes. This facility could be attractive to potential students.

To develop practical and/or fundamental skills

One TAFE director in the school of business described some of his client group as 'eighteen-year-olds with not very good tertiary entrance ranks. We are giving them skills to go into first employment ... a lot of those students have special needs and we have support services to help them in the form of literacy, counselling and "how to study courses"'. Teachers, program directors and counsellors frequently spoke of students who were at TAFE to upgrade their tertiary entrance rank in order to get into university: 'TAFE is used by many people who didn't do well at school, who have an idea of what they want to do and get into a similar category of training and then move on to university. A lot of people do that'.

All TAFEs spoke about the flow of people discontinuing higher education courses and coming back to TAFE. Some students felt that they were not suited to university and they preferred more practical, hands-on work within a more personal, caring environment, but others felt they needed a better grounding in their field of study before they could achieve at a higher level. One student, who went to university with a very high entrance score, left university at the end of first year because he felt he needed more maturity in order to achieve well in higher education. He was not happy with his first year results at university and decided he should do something different for a while. He obtained an automotive apprenticeship with a private training provider and is working in different automotive workshops every 12 months. It is his intention to go back to university to study mechanical engineering, and by that time he is sure he will be much better prepared for study and he will have gained valuable practical experience. TAFE may have a positive role to play as a stepping stone between school and university by providing students with an initial grounding for a higher education course within a supportive environment. In addition, the practical nature of learning in a VET institution may provide a firm basis for further study for some learners.

In contrast, some graduates engage in VET programs for either a specialisation in a practical area or to develop management skills when they have been promoted in their industry and are 'now looking after people and a budget'. One counsellor spoke of graduates from university programs enrolling in diploma level courses, particularly in the area of IT, a TAFE teacher spoke of two PhD students in his IT class and another spoke of graduates coming to TAFE for a specialisation such as computer-aided drafting (CAD) or CADCAM.

Employer choice of training provider

Employers' choices relating to who will be used to deliver their training are often influenced by how the training can be delivered. Training providers have to be flexible in their responses to clients and in tune with clients' needs. Employers will choose the provider who best accommodates those needs within a reasonable time frame. Where two providers offer a similar program and similar flexibility, one employer interviewed 'would choose the one who we believe would have the best knowledge of our industry ... that would be one of the key decision-making things'.

Employers want customisation of programs, and where providers are delivering on site, this can take place readily as the trainer can respond to immediate issues and incorporate them into the training program. On one worksite, the trainer of apprentices sought input from foremen and others in the workshop regarding the developing knowledge and skills of their apprentices. When consolidation of topics was needed, the trainer was able to respond to this immediately. Customisation of training takes place in a different way in one regional centre. Teachers visit the engineering workshops of all potential employers of apprentices and note the machines the employers are using. They then ensure that each apprentice is proficient at using the type of machine owned by their employer.

Some training providers are providing additional services to employers in the form of expertise about the documentation requirements of training and information about government training policy and training rebates. Another service often provided to employers by training providers is assistance with the recruitment of employees. Students in training with the provider are sent to an employer for a trial period, and this makes the selection process much easier for an employer. Employers value these extra services, which can be the deciding factor when an employer will choose one trainer in preference to another. Some group training companies, who employ apprentices and trainees, contract their employees to businesses for 12-month periods, and in that time the business can assess the viability of taking on permanent employees.

Employers want providers to be flexible in their time of training delivery, and courses are being delivered around the clock on some worksites where employees are working three shifts. Employers of apprentices want flexibility of training arrangements for their employees, and small businesses, in particular, want training available at times that suit the business. This means that apprentices might come for training one day a week, for two or three weeks training and then disappear for some months or train in seven-week blocks. One institute is very busy delivering programs in construction in January because in that month activity on building sites is down, whereas nothing is delivered in hospitality because that is one of the busiest months of the year in that industry.

Status of VET

The issue of the status of VET compared with university was mentioned by every TAFE provider visited in the study. School guidance officers and secondary teachers were frequently described as pushing students to aim for university courses and VET was only given consideration as a fallback position. One TAFE teacher pointed out that secondary schools indicate their success by advertising the number of graduating students who gain university entrance. There has been a perception over time that VET is for people who 'don't quite make it'. A careers counsellor described this as 'I think the old perception that TAFE is for people who are not academically competent and university is for those who are still exists very much'. Watson (1999) questions whether schools can make the Year 12 curriculum more inclusive of different types of learners, given the opposition from those who consider that secondary schooling should remain a place of competition for university entrance.

VET providers claimed that part of the problem was that careers advisors in schools are not knowledgeable about the full range of opportunities that VET provides, and potential VET students are not getting realistic information as to what is available. One director commented that the most influential person in student choice is the classroom teacher in schools, and classroom teachers are generally ignorant of the real options available in VET and their limited view is detrimental to students. Teachers themselves have stated that 'we don't know what we don't know' (EQ 1999, p.4). While they are aware of the changes in the nature of work and the impact of information technology, they reported not knowing how to deal with the consequences of these changes in their teaching in order to benefit their students. It is a source of frustration to teachers that they do not know a lot about the key issues facing students once they have left school and do not have the answers for what is best for them in the long term.

In addition to trades courses, TAFE institutes are offering diplomas in a wide range of fields for school leavers and many diploma courses are given credit at universities. In the interviews, young people who had left school recently mentioned that there were more career jobs possible outside higher education than their schools had described, and that it had not been explained to them what jobs were available to students who wanted to pursue practical workshop skills training or study for a diploma.

Some training providers are proactive in educating schools about VET. One institution, in the field of engineering, has 'direct contact with secondary teachers, through people who are very committed to engineering and enthusiastic in a palatable way; that is very important because teachers are often very conservative; we have taken a proactive role in going out to schools because we have found that secondary schools have not been effective in getting the right information about engineering across to their students'.

One TAFE institute is running a program entitled 'Bridge to the Future'. Groups of high school students spend a short amount of time in a number of sections of the TAFE institute learning about the vocational outcomes of different courses and the sorts of things a student does in those programs. Another TAFE institute has introduced taster programs for school students in the field of engineering and has had a significant number of students wanting to do modules in their term holiday breaks. This has resulted in some students taking up apprenticeships and traineeships. Institutes also spoke of functions they hold for guidance officers which provide opportunities for them to become better informed about course offerings and to spend time finding out what it really means to be a student in those institutions.

With the growth of the VET-in-schools program, the interaction between VET providers and secondary schools is expanding. These programs not only provide students with extra skills, but they help them establish a career direction. During site visits, teachers in all fields of the study frequently mentioned that some of the students in their courses had participated in VET programs in their schools. A hospitality teacher had noticed that 'it is becoming more common that they've [his students] started hospitality through a school-based program which is the same introductory modules that we offer'. One participant in the survey described how the VET-in-schools program had influenced her: 'I studied tourism during Years 11 and 12 and I

really enjoyed this subject and with the help of my parents and tourism co-ordinator [at school] I decided to attend this college'. In some States a VET qualification achieved at school can contribute to calculation of a student's tertiary education ranking, to beneficial effect for some students: 'Their VET day each week has had beneficial effects on their school work in terms of skill development and motivation'.

Such initiatives will inevitably lead to schools becoming more aware of the opportunities for students in VET, both in terms of the jobs VET qualifications can lead to and the pathways to further study that students can take having completed VET programs. There are efforts to make TAFE more available to secondary school students by having a seamless line from one system into the other and thus make TAFE a normal stepping stone for students from school, rather than the only focus being university. A recommendation is made by James et al. (1999b), in their report on the higher education choices of rural and isolated school students, that universities, TAFE colleges and schools should continue to build flexible pathways and credit transfer arrangements. Rural students, in particular, are likely to benefit from multiple entry points to higher education, including seamless pathways from TAFE to higher education.

The issue of the status of VET was also discussed on site visits in relation to a parental and societal push for university rather than VET. It was felt that society in general put a higher value on university education. In the study by James et al. (1999b) of senior secondary school students and their higher education choices, it was found that amongst all socioeconomic subgroups TAFE study was a less desirable option than university. The idea of social status was described in an interview with a TAFE teacher as: 'Our students come from a history of whether the family is supportive of TAFE or whether they're uni, so there's a whole lot of external factors going on and in a lot of cases people don't really learn that this is maybe the better place to be until later in life when they have made a few bad choices'. One administrator described this in relation to engineering as: 'We have to fight against some socially imposed ideas. Many of the parents who came here in the migration programs from Europe and worked in engineering don't want their children to work in factories. There is a marketing problem. Choice is being scorned at home'. The idea that TAFE is the place to get a trade was frequently mentioned during site visits as a perception that still exists in many communities. It was felt that TAFE has not won the battle in the media of having intrinsic value; it is thought of as being second best and the poor cousin syndrome has put a lot of people out of the market in terms of choosing VET.

Although the status of university as opposed to VET was a frequently mentioned issue, some changes are taking place. At some TAFE institutions staff had noticed that within the last two years people were looking at TAFE as an alternative to university now that some pathways and credit transfers are being established between the two institutions. People are realising that TAFE has benefits in terms of course cost, ease of access, practical experience and a more supportive environment which is beneficial for many students at the beginning of a career path. It is one way of people avoiding some of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) fees by doing at least a diploma in TAFE, and after the two-year diploma possibly reducing their degree program by one year. A Victorian TAFE institution which had become part of a

university had noticed that the amalgamation was helping general recruitment because of the perception of improved status. Such amalgamations enable students to map out a learning pathway at the time they enter the institution and then work through this pathway within the one organisation.

Support for training by employers

The statistics show that amongst the students surveyed, 11% responded to the statement *my employer sent me here;* that is, to attend the course the student was enrolled in. All the apprentices, trainees and enrolled nurses surveyed would be in this category and there would be some other students whose employers had sent them to their courses. This question does not clarify whether an employer was funding the training, although it implies that this is likely.

During the discussions with providers it was clearly stated that amongst their clientele only a relatively small proportion of students was funded to participate in VET programs at TAFE institutes by their employers. At one institute it was estimated that the vast majority of TAFE students negotiate their learning outside of their employer and '90% of our training is selected by individuals having perused their own options'. Another director commented that 'industry is our primary customer to less than 20% of our total student intake: the bulk of our students come from people just walking in the door'. Yet another observed that 'individuals choose to upgrade their skills; they might be pushed by their employer but a lot of the pull is from their own career structure'. From all the sites visited the consensus was that the majority of part-time students in work attend TAFE of their own accord and not because of any influence from their employer. Many are in courses unrelated to their present job. People often enrolled because of their own career moves rather than for reasons associated with their current employment.

The employers interviewed in the study expressed their support for their employees' obtaining formal qualifications and some offered support in the form of payment of fees and time release during the day for training not available in the evenings. One employer expressed the benefit to him of his employees training as: 'By having that qualification system, if that's going to take 3–4 years to get their associate diploma, they do one module at a time, for that 3–4 years they are trying to learn, they are thinking about what it is they are learning, they are trying to apply it differently on the job, so I think you gain something that way'.

Within the competitive market there was a concern expressed about the use of public funds to substitute for private training funds. With competitive tendering, companies who are registered training organisations can tender for public funds so that the amount of money companies themselves are spending on training can be reduced, while they are still benefitting from the training their employees are receiving. The user choice mechanism was thought to be reinforcing the disinclination of some companies to invest money in training.

Collaboration

Amongst TAFE institutes it is recognised that collaborative models provide the best working arrangements in some situations. If an institute is servicing a national company, it is best to use local training providers who will deliver training at the required standard on some sites, rather than the institute deliver to every training site. One administrator described collaboration in this way: 'There tends to be a lot of communication between TAFE colleges and universities right across the nation to try and build relationships and build partnerships so that when opportunities come along we can offer clients training anywhere'. A TAFE institute director spoke of his good relationship with some private providers and described instances of 'helping each other out'. Billet et al. (1997) report on the partnerships and strategic alliances that exist between TAFE institutes and local enterprises and communities in Victoria. They also report on providers identifying the emerging needs of communities and thus finding markets. An employer interviewed in this study thought that the identification of the training needs of enterprises was an area into which training providers could expand their activities. One private provider did not see other training providers as competitors and this company focussed on trying to develop relationships between providers. This provider felt that improvement in the quality of training comes through co-operation and working together and quality does not improve by people working in isolation. Such a situation, where mutuality of interests is valued over competition, Billet et al. (1997) describe as leading to a mature VET system.

5 Synthesis of findings

This chapter provides a synthesis of the findings of the previous three chapters; that is, from the three sources of data: the literature; the survey; and the site visits. The five research questions (see chapter 1) are used as the framework for this synthesis. The synthesis represents a triangulation on the issues identified from the three components of this study, thereby confirming common findings while also revealing differences.

Research question one: What are the main factors which shape the consciousness and determine the choices of those who enrolled in a VET course?

This question is considered under the topics: influences on choice; status of VET; reasons for choosing the course; and factors influencing choice of institution.

Influences on choice

Individuals are influenced by a range of factors in making their choices regarding VET study. The survey findings show that the most important influence on individual choice is work experience or employment, followed in order by parental or guardian influence, performance in school subjects, advertising booklets or handbooks, personal experience of study at college or university, personal friends and employers.

Before discussing these findings in more detail, it should be noted that the influence of work experience or employment found in this study reflects the composition of the survey sample, which included mature-age students and apprentices and trainees in employment in addition to school leavers. The composition of this survey sample contrasts with other surveys in the literature, which have mostly studied the influences on secondary school student choice regarding further study. Those surveys vary in their findings but all report strong influences from significant others in the lives of school students. Parental influence, careers advisers and school counsellors, peers and teachers all feature in affecting choice (Hannan et al. 1995; Dimitrou 1997a, 1997b; ANOP Research Services 1995; Lankard 1995; Hossler & Maple 1991), more strongly so than for the mix of school leavers and non-school leavers covered by the current study. However, Hannan et al. (1995) discovered that work experience (the most influential factor in the current study in combination with employment) is influential amongst school students as is also performance in school subjects (a fairly influential factor identified in the current study). Advertising booklets and handbooks also have been found, as here, to be influential (ANOP Research Services 1994).

The current study covers a more comprehensive range of individuals than these earlier studies, focussing on students in VET rather than in school. Therefore, it provides more comprehensive information than do the earlier studies and provides a more reliable ordering of major influences on choice for the full range of enrollees. The following discussion provides more detail on the findings concerning those influences from the current study.

This study found that the greatest degree of influence on enrolment is work experience or employment, even though this factor has no influence on more than half of students. Employers themselves do not, in general, have a significant influence, although they typically have at least some influence on those who are in employment. However, since only about one in five students are in full-time employment, and only about half of these are enrolled because their employers require them to be, employer influence is necessarily limited. Overall, employers are not the primary choosers, apart from training schemes clearly linked to employment, including apprenticeships and traineeships. Choice mainly lies with individuals.

Parent or guardian is the second most influential factor, and for the majority of people this factor features at least to some extent in decision-making. Written comments, supported by input from teachers on site visits, illustrate that parental influence may be consultative, it may take the form of insisting on taking up some full-time activity which could mean enrolment in a VET program, or could be associated with family involvement in an industry, such as engineering. VET guidance officers find that school leavers are more influenced by parents and family traditions than are older people who determine choices for themselves.

Newspaper, radio and TV advertising rate very low degrees of influence, although site visits revealed that for some young people advertisements in local newspapers are crucial to their finding out about programs, particularly programs offered by private providers. During site visits, private providers confirmed the success of advertising in their local newspaper as a means of reaching prospective students and their families and friends. In contrast, for TAFE students, often the physical presence and history of the local TAFE college, rather than newspaper advertising, is an influence on student enrolment. Personal contact of one kind or another is important in shaping a decision for many students.

Amongst other factors mentioned by students as also important, employment-related issues are prominent, such as the need to become qualified to get work. The state of the labour market is influential for some individuals in determining the field of study they choose. Information received in the mail can be effective as it prompts individuals who have considered undertaking a program of study to take the final step and enrol in a VET program. Amongst students surveyed, there was a strong emphasis on personal decision-making, which may reflect the fact that more than half the respondents were 20 years of age or older who see themselves as being in charge of their own choices and, consequently, are not very conscious of their sources of information and advice. But it is likely that there are extra-personal influences operating when individuals make choices, even though they are not consciously aware of those influences. The lack of such self-consciousness in decision-making suggests

that there is an unfilled need for assistance in adopting more considered and more deliberate decision-making strategies.

For a significant number of students there is no single particular influence but, rather, a combination of influences when they make their choices. Choice is an individual matter in which the mix of influences varies from person to person, although knowledge seems to derive mainly from traditional sources, especially work experience, family and friends and printed brochures and handbooks. It is likely that students would benefit from training in the use of more deliberate choice strategies as attrition rates are an ongoing problem in VET and other post-compulsory settings (Maxwell & Cumming 1990; Symons 1999; Uren 1999; Yorke 1999 cited in James et al. 1999a). Students could benefit from an expanded range of information sources and meta-cognitive decision strategies that enable them to become more self-conscious and reflective.

Status of VET

Personnel interviewed during site visits frequently commented on the status of VET. They felt that VET is not given equal status with other forms of tertiary education amongst secondary school teachers and school guidance officers and VET is used as a fallback if students are not capable of achieving university entrance. VET personnel believed that part of the problem is that teachers and careers advisors are not well-informed about the range of opportunities that VET has to offer. The literature reveals similar findings. Chapman and Smallwood (1992) and Dimitrou (1997a, 1997b) report that teachers viewed TAFE as a second-best alternative to university and admitted having inadequate understandings of the VET sector. Students interviewed on site visits commented that they had not been given adequate information regarding the career jobs available to students wanting to pursue vocational training. VET personnel also feel that there is a parental and societal push for university rather than for VET, and this is supported by James et al. (1999b), who found in their research that amongst all socioeconomic groups TAFE study was considered less favourably than university study.

To some extent, this perception must be seen as a consequence of attempts (largely failed) of the past 25 years to promote equality of social participation in university studies. No matter how laudable this promotion, the downside has been a perception that VET is second best. Another factor is the persistent promotion of the job accessibility, job security, status and earnings of university graduates. This is a somewhat biased representation of reality since career opportunities, pathways and potentials following VET study are not as well charted or advertised as those following university studies.

The status that individuals attribute to VET does influence the purpose of some enrolments. The qualitative comments revealed that some students were enrolled in VET programs because it was the only program they could get into and the program was not their first choice. The quantitative data also suggest this: about one-quarter of students strongly intend to use their VET program as a stepping stone to another program, although some of these students may be moving within the VET system. Maxwell and Andrews (1994) found that about one-half of students in TAFE diploma

programs intend to use their program as a stepping stone into another tertiary program, typically university study. Whether this is desirable or not depends on whether flexibility or efficiency is valued. There is no clear-cut resolution of this. However, it does seem that many training programs designed for one purpose (such as training for particular occupations) are serving quite different purposes for which they are not designed (such as preparation for university studies).

Site interviews revealed that changes are taking place concerning the perception of VET. VET is being considered more favourably now that there are pathways between TAFE and university with credit transfer between some institutions. Where a TAFE institution has become part of a university, this has been advantageous because of a perception of improved status. In addition, VET-in-schools programs have helped students to establish a career direction. Teachers in all fields of study mentioned having students in their classes who had participated in VET programs while at school, and students themselves commented that such programs had helped them decide on the direction they would take once they had left school.

Reasons for choosing the program

The three reasons students give for choosing VET programs are: first, an immediate job focus; second, personal aspirations; and third, acquiring or upgrading skills for current employment. These findings are similar to those reported from other surveys in the literature, particularly the ANTA studies (1997 & 1998b) and the information received from VUT (1999) and Sunraysia Institute (1999).

Individuals enrolling in a program of study with an orientation toward an immediate job focus frequently give consideration to the job opportunities available before enrolling in a certain field of study. Examples are: individuals in Sydney enrolled in hospitality programs in 1999 in the hope of employment in that industry in 2000 (because of the Olympics); individuals have responded to local demand for tradesmen in certain areas of engineering, such as refrigeration and air-conditioning in Sydney and metal fabrication in Queensland; job opportunities in aged-care are attracting mature-age women returning to work after a period of absence from the workforce.

Students who enrol in VET to realise their aspirations give several explanations. The current program may be a stepping stone to further study or it may be a means of assessing their interest in, or capability for, further study. Some students are pursuing an interest in a certain field of study, some are enrolling in programs for a challenge and others to avoid stagnation, or to enhance self-esteem and affirm their capabilities. Others have a future jobs focus and are studying in order to remain marketable, to give themselves a range of job options or to establish a new career direction. Teachers speak of their students preparing for the future by keeping abreast of changes in business and industry so that they can take advantage of opportunities as they arise in the future. One counsellor spoke of job changing now becoming part of the employment culture, whereas in the past to change career was thought to demonstrate instability. Another spoke of some students enrolling for self-development in terms of improved self-esteem and social interaction skills.

Students who enrol in programs to acquire or upgrade skills for current employment include those students sent for training by their employer. This includes apprentices, trainees and enrolled nurses. Other people enrol to improve their skills and keep up to date, particularly in the field of business, to acquire skills to set up a business or to gain a qualification in order to keep a job once a qualification becomes mandatory.

Factors influencing choice of institution

The survey data show that the most important factors influencing choice of a particular VET institution, rather than some other, are: its course offerings; convenience factors such as proximity to home and course timetable; program affordability; opportunity for practical experiences; quality factors such as reputation of the institution and its qualifications; and institutional ambience, especially whether it is friendly and caring. These findings are largely corroborated by other evidence. James et al. (1999a), in a study of university undergraduates, found that the program offered was the main consideration when students were considering choice of institution, followed by ease of access to home, campus surroundings and atmosphere, the institution's prestige, and the sense of personal fit. However, proximity to home is not always important. Some students will choose from the programs offered at their local institution, whereas others will travel distances to pursue the program of their choice. Affordability featured for rural and isolated school students in a study by James et al. (1999b). The lower cost of enrolment in a TAFE program was frequently mentioned by such students as an attraction compared with other tertiary programs. For some students affordability is more important than quality, partly because quality is difficult to assess, especially in advance of program participation.

VET personnel mention other factors which they consider of importance to some of their students. These include the availability of flexible delivery, particularly for mature-age students in the workforce, the guarantee of work at the end of a program, the development of practical skills in an area of specialisation, and the development of fundamental skills such as literacy skills.

Research question two: To what degree does enrolment in VET courses precede or follow employment?

The survey showed that the strongest reasons students gave for enrolment in VET were related to obtaining a job. That is, enrolment in VET typically precedes employment. This is supported by a previous study of school leavers (ANOP Research Services 1994) whose main reason for enrolling at TAFE was to obtain a qualification for a desired career or job and who believed that this would lead to improved job prospects. Further support comes from ANTA (1997, 1998b) in which the main reason for training given by TAFE graduates was to get a job or to establish a business.

Almost three-quarters of students reported that an employer had no influence on their enrolment in VET or that their reason for attending the program was not a requirement

of an employer. Only 11% of students are attending a VET institution because their employer has sent them there or because of strong encouragement by their employer. Kinsman (1998) also reports that individual voluntary non-sponsored participation in training represents the major activity of formal VET institutions. Site visits confirmed this and directors of institutions stated that, of their clientele, only a small proportion is funded to participate in VET programs by employers, with the vast majority attending for personal reasons. The majority of individuals are organising their own participation in VET programs.

Some students are participating in VET as a result of their employment in order to keep their skills up to date, to gain more job satisfaction, or to gain a promotion. Such motivations are often associated with their current job, although they may be motivated by aspirations for flexibility in the job market of the future—that is, broadening their options. Some students are training in order to obtain a more challenging job or to change career, many of these hoping to escape from unsatisfying part-time work.

Research question three: To what extent do students form a view of what they would like to do and then tailor their job searching and/or VET seeking to particular categories of industry?

The survey showed that job opportunities in certain fields rate highly as a reason for choice of program and student comments confirmed this. The field of tourism and hospitality is thought to offer a wide range of opportunities for work and travel, and students often enrol in this field of study with glamorous perceptions of the industry but little knowledge of the realities of the work involved. Some students in the field of engineering become apprentices in order to get a job, although they may have had little knowledge of the work involved or they may not be working in their preferred area of engineering. Others in engineering are enrolled in programs which they believe have good job opportunities. However, it seems that this is typically a second-order consideration rather than a first-order consideration; that is, the decision to choose engineering as a field of study would appear to come first, with decisions about which area of specialisation within engineering being influenced by relative opportunities for employment. Similarly in the areas of business, tourism and hospitality, and health and community welfare. The emphasis on personal interest as a reason for choice of program supports this interpretation.

The survey showed that the personal interest of individuals was important in choice of program. Reasons such as 'I really wanted to do this course', 'I like this area of study' and 'for interest or personal development', indicate personal interest or liking and feature strongly in choice of course. This is further supported by the data on student enjoyment of certain activities, where there is a link between the types of activities that students enjoy and their chosen field of study.

Some students choose their field of study because they think it fits with their perceived personality or character. In the fields of hospitality and tourism, and health and community welfare, students mentioned that they liked working with people and helping them. Some health and community welfare students wanted to be working in what they considered as a 'worthwhile' occupation. The quantitative data supports the qualitative data concerning enjoyment of certain activities. Health and community welfare students, and tourism and hospitality students, indicate much higher levels of enjoyment from *working with people* and *helping people* than engineering and business students. Engineering students respond much more positively to *making things* and *designing things*, and business students express more interest in *using computers* than other students. Health and community welfare students express most interest in *reading books and magazines* and engineering students are least interested in this activity. The data suggest that decision-making concerning VET participation is influenced by the activities that individuals enjoy. This may be mediated by the influence of performance in certain subjects at school, confirming that the view individuals form of themselves leads them into certain fields of study. The influence of personal interest on choice of field of study is supported by James et al. (1999a), who found that the majority of prospective university students are motivated principally by field of study interests when they make course selections but their goals are influenced by their academic achievements and their assessment of their own abilities.

Research question four: Is there a relationship between the quality and accessibility of VET information and the extent to which trainees feel they have made informed choices, are satisfied with their choices and have positive self-images in relation to their choice?

Information that individuals receive about VET in the form of booklets and handbooks is one of the most influential factors in student course enrolment. The relevant TAFE handbook for each State, listing all TAFE programs within the State, is often nominated as an additional influence of this kind. Information in the form of publications is clearly helpful and influential and information received through the mail can be an effective means of providing the final impetus for enrolment in a VET program. Personal contact with VET providers in the form of open days at institutions, information sessions and personal discussions with teaching staff is also influential.

While students commented on the good quality of the information provided about VET in publications, the survey data do not provide information about the accessibility of information to students or the breadth of knowledge that students have about course offerings. This was provided on site visits by teachers and counsellors who consistently stated that students generally are not aware of the course options available to them nor of the pathways that are available from certificate to degree programs. Mostly, students are poorly informed. Even where information is available,

students often do not have the research skills to find the information or motivation to do so. Students often base their decisions on inadequate information and in doing so often make poor choices.

Publications and personal contact with providers may inform individuals about what VET has to offer; however, it cannot substitute for personal experience of a field of study. The lack of knowledge about the field of work that a program of study leads to, and the opportunities offered in that line of work, can result in poor decision-making and may have some bearing on the high attrition rates at TAFE institutes.

The survey data cannot inform the extent to which trainees feel satisfied with the course choices they have made as the data were collected at an early stage of course participation. This was arranged in order to obtain recent recall of the reasons why students had made their choice of program. However, the data do refer to the expectations that students have of their programs. Students were positive about the likelihood that the program they were enrolled in would help them develop new skills and that this would lead to their gaining a qualification, which was the main reason given for enrolling in a VET program. Students anticipate there will be a match between expectation and experience. Whether these expectations are realised and whether students feel they have made an informed choice needs to be assessed later in the program.

Research question five: What are the policy implications for national and State authorities, industry bodies and VET providers?

National and State authorities and industry bodies

VET in Australia during the 1990s has focussed on meeting the long-term objectives of the economy. The national VET training agenda has constructed vocational provision to service mainly the industry sector with the key objective of enhancing economic growth. Training is constructed with the aim of being more flexible and responsive to employer needs and making training opportunities easier for young people to access. This focus is considered too narrow and is opposed by many working in the VET field (Harmsworth 1996; Woolley 1996; Barratt-Pugh 1998; Kinsman 1998; Pickersgill 1998) who advocate that individuals must develop generic skills and the learning skills of reflection and inquiry in addition to industry-specific skills in order to achieve the flexibility and mobility needed for an uncertain employment future. Many individuals are aware of the need to be prepared for a rapidly changing labour market, and they are investing in training in order to keep up to date and marketable by being prepared for a range of options which will allow their job seeking to be more broadly based.

However, employer motivation for training is generally focussed on their own short-term needs and the most cost-effective training provision, rather than on high quality training and long-term benefits (Selby Smith et al. 1997; Noble et al. 1998).

Consequently, the long-term interests of employees do not always intersect with the short-term interests of their employers. On the other hand, even the long-term interests of the employers themselves may be compromised by failing to develop the capabilities of their employees as fully as possible. As an extension of this point, it should be noted that implementation of the concept of the 'learning organisation', with its involvement of the whole organisation in a participatory process of learning how to do things better, is rarely mentioned in discussions on the training agenda. Rather, efforts at enhancing the human performance of organisations tend to focus on individual employee training for predefined tasks. However, while training inputs are important, they are insufficient on their own to meet future challenges to organisational performance. Improvements in individual skills and work practices only provide short-term advantage compared with developing an organisation's capacity to go on learning from within (learning to learn) (see Davis 1995).

The view that the training market will lead to a better service for students is challenged by critics of the training market (Peoples 1996; Anderson 1997a; Golding & Volkoff 1998) because the goals of equity and access do not exist in practice. Access is inequitable for the unemployed where user-choice funding is restricted to contracted employment (Noble et al. 1998) with the focus on industry requirements and workplace training. Most adult learning takes place among those already in work (Watson 1999) and those not in work have to seek out learning opportunities for themselves. In addition to the opportunity for training presented to those in employment, the motivation to train is high because of its potential impact on personal satisfaction, job motivation and job performance (Heyes & Stuart 1996).

The survey showed that for some unemployed individuals and other students, access to training can be limited because of cost and distance of a training institution from home, particularly in regional areas. The current centralised market approach of VET is not responsive to local community needs and neglects the social needs of individuals and communities (Billet et al. 1997). It also neglects the concept of lifelong learning which needs to be nurtured for the benefit of both individuals and enterprises. The ongoing development and maintenance of knowledge is essential in a changing and increasingly competitive world.

The lack of full-time employment opportunities for young people and the predominance of part-time and casual work means that young people are not receiving the formal training opportunities that would be offered to those working full time in permanent employment. Because of the casual nature of the employment that many young people experience and the limited type of work involved, individuals often experience a cycle of unemployment, VET, part-time work and underemployment which may be supplemented by VET, employment and unemployment (Golding & Volkoff 1998). Such movements in and out of post-secondary education are considered normal in Canada (Looker & Dwyer 1998). With full-time work difficult to obtain, individuals in the survey spoke of enrolling in a VET course with a private provider for the purpose of finding a job. If work was offered before training was completed, the opportunity of full-time employment was given priority over completion of a training program. A program director also commented that students will leave when a job is offered before completing a qualification because the opportunity for work takes a higher priority.

The idea that the training market will provide better opportunities for individuals relies on individual clients being able to access information regarding what is on offer to them and individuals being able to make informed choices. This is not borne out in practice because limited attention has been given to developing mechanisms for information generation and dissemination (Anderson 1997a), and the current study shows that some students lack the ability to engage in effective decision-making regarding their training and the world of work.

The survey indicates that individuals are mostly financing their own training. Individuals are not only acquiring knowledge in order to get a job but they are also training for the future, a commitment that needs to be supported. Most enrolments in VET are leading employment aspirations, rather than following employment.

VET providers

Some individuals who are participating in VET are not actively engaged in the courses they have chosen and this may not be uncommon amongst the wider VET student population given the high attrition rates (Symons 1999; Uren 1999). Individuals need to be given the opportunity to make informed decisions about the areas of training they choose by knowing more about where programs can lead and what work may be involved following certain fields of study and specialisations. Taster programs at institutions could be helpful for young people who are undecided about what they want to do. Students are often poorly informed about the courses on offer, training pathways and the world of work despite this material being available. They often have poor research skills and make their decisions on limited information. Students place a strong emphasis on personal decision-making, which could mean that they are operating at a subjective level and not exploring other factors they need to consider before finalising choices.

Employment or work experience was a strong influence on choice and for some students work experience through school programs led to enrolment in VET after leaving school. During site visits, teachers in all fields of study mentioned that some of their students had participated in VET programs in schools. It may be advantageous for VET institutions to develop strong links with schools for the purposes of advertising course offerings and for giving students an opportunity to experience VET through VET-in-schools programs.

In relation to the issue of the status of VET, one of the ways of improving TAFE's image recommended in a report by Deloitte, Touche, Tohmatsu (1997) is for TAFE institutes to develop relationships with teachers in schools in catchment areas. Another is to convince students of the value of TAFE training by presenting TAFE as producing graduates with creditable qualifications which appeal to employers and lead to respected and rewarding careers.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

In this final chapter, issues emerging from the study are drawn together in the form of conclusions and recommendations. The issues are reported at three levels—national, institutional and individual. At the national level, priorities given to policies in the national VET agenda, and how these affect student choice, are considered. At the institutional level, issues are discussed in terms of institutional policies and strategies, teacher involvement and counselling. Institutional policies and strategies determine which programs will be taught and how they will be promoted; teacher involvement concerns the ways in which teachers participate in, and assist, the process of student choice; and counselling is concerned with short-term and long-term assistance to students in making their choices. At the individual level, it is suggested that the ways in which students actually make their choices need further study.

National level

This study has highlighted some issues which are important for the national VET agenda. These issues are not entirely new, but this study adds additional support and new emphasis to similar findings in other studies.

It does indeed seem to be the case that 'a substantial gulf exists between national priorities for VET reform and the expressed needs and interests of students' (Anderson 1998, p.73). This is particularly so concerning current policy emphases on employers as the primary clients of VET. This study has shown that choice is essentially a personal matter, rather than an employer-driven prerogative. Employers have a direct influence over only a small portion of VET enrolments. Most VET students are positioning themselves for the job market, whether to get a job, to get another job or to broaden their skills for future job possibilities in a changing job market.

For this changing job market, there is value in training to achieve flexibility, allowing for a range of options and better preparedness for an uncertain future. Kinsman (1998, p.132) describes this as training for 'anticipated labour market transactions' in contrast to 'completed labour market transactions' as in the case of apprentices and trainees who are training as part of their employment. Anticipation of this kind is to be encouraged. Students can make more rapid and sensitive adjustments to the needs of the market through enlightened self-interest than is likely by either governments or employers, provided that training providers have similar flexibility of response.

Inflexibilities in the training market need to be removed or at least lessened. National employer-driven competencies and training packages have some appeal in terms of portability of qualifications. However, there is a danger that they may quickly represent yesterday's workplace practices and needs rather than those of the future, especially since many of the specific skills which will be needed in the future are not

yet known. This tension between immediate employer needs and long-term market needs and between the interests of employers and the interests of employees can only be resolved by a more deliberate attempt to provide a balance between immediate and long-term training needs. While the specific skills of the future may not be known, it is clear that they will demand more generic competencies, transferable skills, flexibility and adaptability, enquiry and problem-solving skills and capacity to continue learning. VET programs need to emphasise these kinds of outcomes.

It also needs to be realised that VET plays a large role in providing a means for many people to develop their personal interests, develop new capabilities, discover new opportunities, establish self-confidence and self-affirmation, realise new challenges, consider alternative options for employment, retrain after periods of absence from the workforce, upgrade to more interesting or challenging employment, and build a foundation for more advanced study. This role transcends narrow employer interests and needs but strengthens both the general capacity of the national workforce and its cultural resilience. More recognition needs to be given to the importance of this broader role for training providers, particularly the public providers, that is, TAFE.

Work experience/employment is generally perceived by VET students as the most influential factor in their decision to enrol in a particular course of study. Clearly, the opportunity to experience work gives people insights into the nature of work and the demands of the job market, shaping their realisation of their own interests, their perceptions of employment opportunities and their understanding of the expectations of the job market. The extent to which many jobs are now 'hidden' and 'distant' from direct experience by young people and the extent to which jobs are changing rapidly so that future opportunities are difficult to anticipate make it important to find ways in which to provide experience of current work situations, especially for young people. This can provide an appropriate experiential and information base for people's decision to invest their time and effort in particular training courses. There is an urgent need to find new ways of providing work experience for young people in advance of their having to make choices of which training program to commit themselves to.

Of course, the relationship between work experience and training is not a progression in one direction. Personal vignettes in this study reveal complex relationships among many life experiences and influences on people's employment and training histories. Also, many people use VET courses as a means to discovering more about themselves and about employment opportunities. Training programs often provide the first real opportunity for some people to discover what their own capabilities are and how these might fit the demands of the job market. However, these understandings do not develop suddenly but are informed by experiences over lengthy periods of time, reaching back into their early school years. All of this makes it imperative that work experiences of various kinds be provided as part of every student's schooling and that these experiences be linked to a systematic program of career guidance which helps students to interpret those experiences and to incorporate them into their developing understandings of themselves and the world of work. Efforts in this area need to be considerably expanded in our schools and substantial resources will need to be provided to make it successful. These resources, and engagement in developing new programs in this area, will need to be provided by both government and employers.

The national training agenda also needs to encourage stronger relationships between VET providers and schools, although it needs to be recognised that many secondary schools are already acting as VET providers under delegation from State training authorities. However, this does not diminish the need for collaboration with other providers, especially those with whom students may articulate for further training on leaving school. VET providers and schools both need to be more energetic in developing collaborative relationships in order to enrich the learning experiences of students and help them to discover more about training opportunities appropriate to them. Some States already have innovative programs linking schools and TAFE and some institutions are energetically initiating programs such as 'taster programs' in schools. More needs to be done to encourage such links and to develop new approaches.

Summarising the previous discussion, there is a need to remove or lessen inflexibilities in the training market, to recognise the primary agency of student interests and needs, to put more emphasis on long-term future-oriented training needs, to recognise the broader role played by training institutions in assisting personal development, to provide more extensive and more pertinent opportunities for experiences and understandings of work, to link these opportunities to long-term, systematic, school-based programs of career guidance, and to establish stronger relationships and innovative programs linking schools and training institutions. These initiatives would revitalise VET. They would also contribute to an improvement in its status.

Currently, VET has low status. Deliberate attempts need to be made to raise its status. More positive images of the value of vocational training qualifications and of the jobs to which they lead need to be generated. Better information strategies need to be devised to raise awareness of different and changing forms of employment opportunities and their training needs. School teachers need to be co-opted as ambassadors for VET so that they promote positive attitudes towards choice of VET and encourage more sensitive matching of personal interests and capabilities and training opportunities and challenges.

Of course, positive images must be honest to be successful. The VET sector has to prove itself to be relevant, worthwhile and engaging. It must demonstrate that its programs lead to rewarding work opportunities. However, scenarios of work opportunities can be constructed that go beyond immediate employment to suggest pathways to personal advancement within business and industry. Such scenarios need to counter the self-destructive notion that the only pathway to personal fulfilment, status and wealth in the society is through university degree studies. Other visions of opportunities need to be constructed emphasising multiple avenues to personal advancement, expanding the horizons of those in training so that they can aspire to more distant possibilities in their future. Raising the status of VET in this way will require a concerted effort of research and development. Resources need to be devoted to this urgently.

Institutional level

Institutional policies and strategies

Training providers vary considerably in their profiles and programs and meet different needs within the training market. Different programs offer different attractions for different people. This diversity among training providers should continue to be encouraged. Diversity allows the value and quality of different approaches to be tested in a competitive environment where the choices made by individual enrollees ultimately favour those programs that are seen to be of highest value and greatest quality. The encouragement of diversity also supports a culture of deliberate attention to individual student need, especially involving attention to future study and work opportunities.

For example, some TAFE institutions have been integrated into universities, offering both higher education and VET within a single institution. In these institutions it is possible to offer students a wide range of courses, career pathways and personalised study options. Possible training pathways within the institution can be tailored to students who are presented with a range of options. Students have the flexibility of completing a qualification and leaving the institution for work or choosing to move through a series of qualifications from VET to higher education or vice versa. Where such integration of VET and higher education does not exist within the same institution (and even where it does), strategic alliances between training providers need to be developed so that students can be offered various options for articulation between programs in different institutions and more assistance in planning how they might exercise these options.

Another way for providers to be adaptive to individual student need is to provide stronger links to employment opportunities. This can be achieved through development of articulation arrangements between providers and employers. For example, one private training provider is attractive to students because of the close relationships that have been established with employers. The relationship between training and work can then be more fluid and opportunistic; that is, the needs of both students and employers can be addressed as situations unfold. As employment opportunities with these employers arise, students can be referred or recommended by careful matching of student capabilities and employer requirements. In other words, as a result of the understandings which have developed between the training provider and employers, students can be articulated between training and employment even before they have finished the training program. This is a beneficial arrangement for both students and employers (and also the training provider). Where this involves the offer of an apprenticeship, this can mean that the student transfers from a prevocational program to a certificate program.

Teacher involvement

At different TAFE institutions teachers display different levels of involvement in promoting their courses and are given different levels of autonomy to do so. Some

teachers are very proactive in this regard: for example, responding to competition or declining student numbers by developing new courses or updating existing offerings in order to meet local needs and anticipated new markets. However, some teachers are frustrated by institutional resistance to their attempts to develop new programs or approaches. Some TAFE teachers actively promote their course offerings in schools and conduct 'taster' courses for students so that students can sample different training programs before making an enrolment decision. However, other TAFE teachers do not see course promotion of this kind as their responsibility and rely on other personnel in their institution to advertise and promote their programs. Differences in this regard are most noticeable between institutions rather than within institutions. That is, such differences in teacher involvement result from differences in institutional policy, with lack of initiative by teachers typically resulting from the absence of direct encouragement and support by management. It would appear desirable that all institutions develop deliberate policies and strategies for teacher involvement in the promotion of their programs.

Another aspect of TAFE teacher involvement in promotion of institute programs is through their contact with employers. Contact with employers is often an important means for encouraging employers to choose the institute for its training needs. Beyond that, it is also important for keeping TAFE teachers abreast of employer needs and new technology and work practices and for developing channels of communication between training programs and employment settings. Unfortunately, there are cases where institutional policy does not allow direct contact between TAFE teachers and employers, with this role being designated as the responsibility of specific staff. Where this occurs, the policy is motivated by management's desire to present a consolidated image and more 'professional' interface with employers as potential clients. However, this means that the benefits of direct communication between TAFE teachers and employers are unrealised (particularly the understandings that teachers can develop of the employment settings their students may come from or go to). It is recommended that TAFE institutions develop more flexible arrangements for maintaining contacts between teachers and employers.

Information dissemination and advertising

Enrollees in VET derive their information from a variety of sources and no single source of information is relevant for everyone. Direct information from institution to potential enrollee appears to be most effective, although successful communication can take a variety of forms (including handbooks and brochures, newspaper and radio advertisements, open days and career days, and visitation and taster programs). However, parents, relatives and friends are influential in shaping people's decisions, especially for younger people, so information dissemination strategies need to include these second-order targets as well. No single method of outreach is likely to be successful. A mix of strategies is needed so that different audiences are reached in different ways.

Training providers also need to be sensitive to the context in which they operate and tailor their information dissemination strategies to fit the circumstances. Thus, for example, in country areas or where there are potentially strong links to the local community, training providers need to make use of those links in advertising

themselves. This may involve community image building through community news and events, and personal contacts with local groups and agencies, rather than large scale advertising programs. On the other hand, in the larger cities where the catchment area may be quite extensive and where there may be more direct competition with other providers, a more broadly based advertising program may be needed. Again, however, since potential enrollees appear to value personal contact with the institution, ways need to be found to personalise the promotion of its programs. Well-designed handbooks and brochures appear to be a good investment. But so too may be programs which make the institution more accessible, allow personal questions to be explored in a relaxed way and convey an image of the institution as welcoming and caring (provided that it is).

There also needs to be some tailoring of messages to the characteristics of different clientele groups for different programs. That is, information about the institution's program should enable the individual person to discover the program that matches his/her own self-image and aspirations. Different programs appeal to people with different personalities. The ways in which different programs will resonate with different personality characteristics should be made clear, although this needs to be done in such a way as to avoid inappropriate stereotyping.

Focussing on advertising training programs and their appeal is one aspect of promoting VET, but attention also needs to be given to the future occupations lying beyond the training period. It is a critical issue that in some areas of study people have little or no knowledge of the work entailed in certain jobs. Students may have heard verbal descriptions of certain occupations or have images of work in certain industries but often they have no real understanding of what the work involves. There seems to be a need for young people to explore work environments and opportunities more deliberately. People have images of work but not until they get into the workplace do they understand the nature and demands of many jobs. The development of CD ROM materials could be one way of assisting young people to engage in the world of work in the absence of work experience.

Training programs also need to incorporate more direct experience of work and to provide opportunities for discussion and clarification on what work in the relevant industry is like and where it can lead. Dwyer and Wynn (1998) support the need for such information: 'Individual young people need much more systematic knowledge about the realities of the labour markets they are aiming for, through opportunities to reflect on their experiences of work and to analyse the broader picture' (p.86). It is recommended that VET providers be encouraged to develop innovative ways of providing students, both before and during training, with vicarious experiences of work situations and with real understandings of the expectations of employers.

Counselling

Most students are perceived by VET teachers and counsellors as having limited knowledge about VET courses and potential training and career pathways. Other researchers have reached similar conclusions. Johnson (1997) found that many Year 12 students are not rational decision-makers and that they rely on chance encounters and easily accessible information sources to help inform their post-secondary

decisions. Further, students are often untargeted in their goals and have a "see what happens" attitude. James et al. (1999a) have reported similar findings with regard to a lack of knowledge about tertiary courses amongst university students, with their choice of course often being based on limited, subjective knowledge. This limited range of student knowledge of VET and of employment pathways, and the restricted nature of their decision strategies, mean that many students make unwise choices. There is a need to improve the knowledge and strategies of students for making choices on their future study and work.

VET teachers and counsellors perceive that one reason for students having limited knowledge of VET options is that school guidance officers, counsellors and teachers also have limited knowledge of VET options. Their orientation is to encourage students to aim for university rather than vocational training, the latter being considered a second choice if students cannot attain the qualifications needed for university study. Other research has also reported limited knowledge among school teachers about choices facing school leavers. School teachers themselves feel confused about how to guide their students towards the future since they lack broader understandings of those choices, especially the changing nature of work and of employment opportunities. Because of these uncertainties and a lack of knowledge, secondary school teachers focus on the "here and now" with a focus on the teaching of subject matter. Instead of adopting a visionary outlook, they tend to restrict themselves to their area of certainty and expertise. School guidance officers, counsellors and teachers need to be assisted to acquire and maintain current knowledge of VET programs and training and employment pathways. This requires national and State support for programs directed at improving vocational information dissemination in schools, involving teachers as well as guidance personnel; it also requires the support of VET institutions in providing locally relevant information to schools.

Information dissemination is important but students also need assistance in developing decision strategies. It is clear from this study that there is a widespread need for training in the use of deliberate choice strategies in order for people to make informed choices about their selection of training and related work. Misko (1999) advocates that young people be guided in their development of career and life aspirations during their schooling rather than giving attention to them later when they have limited aspirations because of a lack of earlier training. We support this suggestion. Students need access to information about what is available to them in terms of VET, and some mechanisms need to be established to make this information readily available to them. But information in itself is insufficient. People also need assistance in developing decision-making strategies. A component of this would be helping students to develop a greater self-awareness of the way in which their decisions are shaped and made at a meta-cognitive level of knowledge and how to manage their thinking processes more deliberately. This will require new programs in schools. There is an urgent need for research and development on this issue to be supported at national and State levels.

However, schools are not the only location for such programs of training in decision-making strategies. VET institutions also need to offer such assistance to students, especially to adults whose school experience has not supported the development of

such decision-making strategies. An OECD (1996) report recognises that educational and career guidance is becoming increasingly important as the relationship between education and employment changes. In the past, most transitions between different levels of education, or between education and work, happened more or less automatically, as individuals moved from one phase to another. But these natural progressions are breaking down and linear pathways no longer exist for many people. Skills acquired during initial education no longer last a lifetime and people move through careers which are likely to include periods of conventional work, education, training, self-employment and perhaps, unemployment. To develop these skills adequately, educational and career guidance needs to be offered throughout all educational levels as part of the education and training curriculum—and not only at transition points. That is, assistance in developing decision-making strategies for training and work need to infuse all education and training programs. Therefore, VET institutions need to be included as sites for research and development on this issue, along with schools as previously recommended (and also, we would think, along with universities).

Individual level

Student choice

For most people there is no single important influence on their choice of VET study; rather, choice is made by consideration of a combination of factors. Choice is essentially an individual matter in which personal knowledge and experience are, not surprisingly, very important. This agrees with the findings of Looker and Dwyer (1998) whose work shows that people make educational decisions by balancing supports, barriers, costs and benefits. The reality of choosing to undertake vocational training is that making a wise decision requires high-level personal decision-making skills, including skills in obtaining and systematising information on providers and courses as well as skills in considering the match to personal needs, interests, capabilities and aspirations. Given the general lack of knowledge and skill in decision-making revealed in this and other studies, there is a need to develop programs that will enhance people's capacity for more deliberate, considered and self-conscious decision-making strategies. This has already been discussed earlier in this chapter.

Student compatibility with courses

A noticeable number of students appear to be inappropriately enrolled in VET courses—that is, to have made inappropriate choices. This may result from a lack of information about their options, inappropriate consideration of their options, inadequate understanding of the work involved in their field of study, or an imposition by another person, usually a parent or a government agency. Obviously, inappropriately placed students pose problems both for providers and for themselves, especially in terms of effort and cost, lost time and income, and feelings of frustration and inadequacy. Clearly, not all such situations can be avoided. Sometimes, discovery of a mismatch between personal attributes and aspirations and the realities of the course and the work can only occur through trying it. Nevertheless, since it is

perceived to be a problem, attention needs to be given to ways of alleviating the problem.

Some alleviation should result if the programs on career development and decision strategies previously recommended are implemented. This includes programs to provide better access to information about VET and the world of work and to enhance informed decision-making. Schools have a role to play in this process by making more provision for a combination of vocational offerings and traditional school subjects as part of the process, already well advanced in some States, of encouraging more students to stay on until Year 12, possibly pursuing traineeships and apprenticeships while still at school. This direction of development needs to be accepted as a valued practice rather than an inferior choice and be considered as an acceptable option for many students, embedded within the school curriculum. This may go some way to reducing the current tendency to view VET as an option to be exercised only after failure in the academic curriculum rather than something which might be entered into positively.

Some alleviation of this problem might also be possible through redesign of VET programs to allow more 'funnelling' from generic skills to specialised skills. The opportunity to choose their area of specialisation in a stepwise fashion while moving through the VET system would allow people to discover progressively more about the kinds of programs and work that suit their particular interests, capabilities and aspirations. Transfer with credit between programs then becomes more possible since there would be more common elements in different programs. Serious consideration needs to be given at a national level to this kind of redesign of VET programs. VET providers and industry training advisory bodies should also give attention to ways in which pathways through training programs might offer stepwise choices through exploitation of existing overlaps in generic skills development.

Another way of providing opportunities for stepwise decisions is through the VET-in-schools programs. These programs allow sampling and trial of several possibilities without the student being committed to a single training program which may be unsuitable for them. Students can discover more about themselves and their future options before having to make their choice of post-secondary program. Sweet (1998) observes that the school system has responded to the increasing diversity of students' interests and talents since the increased retention rates of students during the 1980s but that, although there has been a growth in VET programs since 1995, overall there has been little change in the sorts of courses that Year 11 and Year 12 students are taking during the 1990s. This may be the case overall, but some States such as Queensland have made substantial progress in the take-up of VET in schools. Looker & Dwyer (1998), reporting on their analysis of rural and urban young people, conclude that 'one of the themes that comes through this analysis is the need for more flexible approaches to schooling ... Few young people are formally prepared to make the transition from secondary to tertiary schooling. ... To the extent that schools do focus on post-secondary schooling, the emphasis tends to be on university preparation ... Both policy makers and researchers need to question whether "university education for all" is the appropriate goal, or whether other educational options are not more appropriate alternatives in certain settings and for certain youth' (pp.18–19). We

support this conclusion and recommend further efforts at embedding VET within the senior secondary school curriculum.

Extending students' horizons

The evidence of this study is that students in VET programs are generally limited in their vision of where their training program may lead apart from an immediate anticipated job. Some see obtaining that job as more important than completion of the training program. Giving students a vision of future possibilities is not the same as making sure they are well informed about their training options and not the same as equipping them with decision-making strategies. Helping students to develop a vision of their future is about extending their horizons beyond the end of their training program. This needs to be a third component of career development, along with acquiring information on training options and developing decision-making strategies. As with the other two components of career development, this needs to permeate the whole of their education and training experience. It is not something that can be left to be dealt with at the end of the training period, as they enter the workforce, but must be developed over time.

An important issue in helping students to develop a vision of their future and extend their horizons beyond the end of the training period is the difficulty of forecasting the future, particularly in relation to employment opportunities. The future should not be expected to be a simple linear extension of the current world. New types of jobs are likely to emerge and new types of skills are likely to be required. Therefore, anticipating future demands, expectation and possibilities in employment cannot be a fixed and static activity. The future needs to be continually re-assessed and re-forecast. It is not possible to map a certain path through employment opportunities of the future when so many of the details are necessarily uncertain. Nevertheless, training can be provided for continually re-assessing the possibilities and charting new courses into the future from each new vantage point. The capacity to engage in this activity of continual review of future possibilities allows people to optimise their opportunities and maximise their efficacy. It is recommended that further research and development be undertaken on how best to develop students' capabilities for continually re-examining their future opportunities and ways to reach them.

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Appendices

1 Sampling plan per field of study

2 Groups sampled

3 Background information statistics

4 Employment history

5 Whereabouts of respondents in year prior to survey

6 Factor analysis of reasons for doing course

7 Likelihood of course producing each outcome

8 Site visits

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Appendix 1

Sampling plan per field of study

Distribution by location

State	Total for State	Capital	Metropolitan	Rural	Remote
NSW	15	7	1	6	1
VIC	15	7	1	6	1
QLD	10	5	1	4	-
WA	5	3	-	2	-
SA	5	3	-	2	-
TOTAL	**50**	**25**	**3**	**20**	**2**

Distribution by provider

State	Public	Private	Public capital	Private capital	Private rural
NSW	12	3	5	2	1
VIC	12	3	5	2	1
QLD	8	2	3	2	-
WA	4	1	2	1	-
SA	4	1	2	1	-
TOTAL	**40**	**10**	**17**	**8**	**2**

Distribution by course level

State	Diploma	Certificate 4	Certificate 3	Certificates 1 or 2
NSW	3	3	6	3
VIC	3	3	6	3
QLD	2	2	4	2
WA	1	1	2	1
SA	1	1	2	1
TOTAL	**10**	**10**	**20**	**10**

Appendix 2

Groups sampled

Distribution by location

State	Total for State	Capital	Metropolitan	Rural	Remote
NSW	42	23	2	15	2
VIC	36	22	4	14	1
QLD	20	8	4	8	-
WA	22	19	0	3	-
SA	18	10	0	8	-
TOTAL	**138**	**82**	**10**	**48**	**3**

Distribution by provider

State	Public	Private	Private capital	Private rural
NSW	34	8	5	3
VIC	32	4	4	0
QLD	14	6	6	-
WA	21	2	2	-
SA	14	4	4	-
TOTAL	**115**	**24**	**21**	**3**

Distribution by course level

State	Diploma	Certificate 4	Certificate 3	Certificates 1 or 2
NSW	6	9	17	10
VIC	7	13	9	7
QLD	5	3	10	3
WA	9	7	3	3
SA	4	3	7	4
TOTAL	**31**	**35**	**45**	**27**

Appendix 3

Background information statistics

Gender of participants

Gender	Count	Percentage
Female	878	59
Male	621	41
Missing data	2	

Age groups of participants

Age group	Count	Percentage
Under 20	690	46
20 – 24	315	21
25 – 34	232	15
35 – 44	172	11
45 and over	87	6
Missing data	5	

Ethnic background of participants

Ethnicity	Count	Percentage
Indigenous	37	2
Non-indigenous	1 435	98
Missing data	29	

Extent of use of languages other than English

Language other than English spoken at home	Count	Percentage
None of the time	1 198	81
Some of the time	131	9
Most of the time	74	5
All of the time	75	5
Missing data	23	

Highest level of schooling reached by participants

Highest school level	Count	%
Before year 7	4	0
Year 7	4	0
Year 8	12	1
Year 9	39	3
Year 10	300	20
Year 11	206	14
Year 12	916	62
Missing data	22	

Vocational awards received

Awards received	Count
Trade ticket	47
Certificate or advanced certificate	364
Diploma, associate diploma or advanced diploma	56
Bachelor degree	21
Other	91

Site of training

Training Site	Count
At college	1 174
At work	26
At both work and college	268

Type of enrolment

Course enrolment	Count
Part-time	365
Full-time	1 114

Appendix 4

Employment history

Length of time in current employment

Years in current employment	Count
Less than 1	301
1 to 5	429
6 to 10	49
11 to 15	13
More than 15	8

Size of enterprise of current employer

Size of enterprise	Count
Small	298
Medium	236
Large	269

Appendix 5

Whereabouts of respondents in year prior to survey

Place	Count
At school	345
In a prevocational course	28
In a vocational course	102
At university	27
Working full time	306
Working part time	141
Looking for work	93
Not working and not looking for work	81
At school and in a prevocational course	3
At school and in a vocational course	10
At school and university	1
At school and working full time	5
At school and working part time	127
At school and looking for work	29
At school and not looking for work	8
At school and a prevocational course and working part time	2
At school and in a vocational course and working part time	8
At school, working full time and working part time	1
At school, working full time and looking for work	1
At school, working part time and looking for work	9
At school, in a prevocational course and looking for work	1
At school, in a vocational course and looking for work	2
At school, in a prevocational course, working full time and looking for work	1
At school, in a vocational course, looking for work and not looking for work	1
On a prevocational course and on a vocational course	1
On a prevocational course and working full time	1
On a prevocational course and working part time	3
On a prevocational course and looking for work	3
On a prevocational course and not looking for work	1
On a vocational course and at university	1
On a vocational course and working full time	21
On a vocational course and working part time	38
On a vocational course and looking for work	6
On a vocational course and not looking for work	3
On a vocational course, at university and working part time	1
On a vocational course, at university and looking for work	1
On a vocational course, working part time and not looking for work	2
On a vocational course, looking for work and not looking for work	1
At university and working full time	2
At university and working part time	11
At university and looking for work	1

Place	Count
At university, working part time and looking for work	1
Working full time and working part time	3
Working full time and looking for work	6
Working full time, working part time and looking for work	1
Working part time and looking for work	23
Working part time, looking for work and not looking for work	1
Looking for work and not looking for work	2

Appendix 6

Factor analysis of reasons for doing course

	Factor loadings		
Reason	**1**	**2**	**3**
For interest or personal development	.672		
I really wanted to do this course	.639		
I like this area of study	.621		
To change career	.606		
To obtain a more challenging job	.584		
To gain more job satisfaction	.546	.492	
As a stepping stone to another course	.519		
Required by employer		.754	
To obtain a promotion		.720	
Required for apprenticeship or traineeship		.668	
To update skills		.659	
To get a job			.757
To gain qualifications			.673
There are good job opportunities in this field			.649
It will lead to a well paid job			.645
To acquire skills to run my own business			.483

Note:

1 Only loadings greater than .4 reported. The factoring method was principal components analysis with varimax rotation.

2 Factor 1: Personal interest and aspiration
Factor 2: Acquiring or upgrading skills for current employment
Factor 3: Immediate job focus—necessity of qualifications

Appendix 7

Likelihood of the course producing each outcome

Experiences	Field of study	1	2	3	4	5
Helping me develop new skills	B	1	4	24	30	41
	E	3	6	18	32	42
	H	1	3	12	3	52
	T	1	4	10	31	54
Giving me a feeling of success	B	2	10	36	31	22
	E	7	14	32	27	21
	H	1	5	19	36	39
	T	2	8	28	31	31
Helping me reach my work goals	B	4	10	30	33	23
	E	6	13	26	25	30
	H	4	6	18	29	42
	T	4	10	20	30	36
Building on the skills I already have	B	4	12	28	32	24
	E	8	14	25	28	25
	H	6	11	18	32	33
	T	8	11	22	27	33
Interest and excitement	B	7	22	34	20	17
	E	10	18	30	23	20
	H	1	10	22	29	38
	T	6	10	25	27	33
Helping me decide if I want a job in this field	B	9	12	25	27	27
	E	16	19	24	16	25
	H	15	12	16	24	33
	T	9	11	17	25	39

1 = Not at all 2 = A small amount 3 = A fair amount 4 = A large amount 5 = A huge amount

B = Business E = Engineering H = Health & community welfare T = Tourism & hospitality

Appendix 8

Site visits

State	Institute	Location	Main Focus
New South Wales	Sydney Institute of Technology	Sydney	Engineering
New South Wales	Western Institute of TAFE	Dubbo	All fields
New South Wales	Western Sydney Institute of TAFE Welfare	Penrith	Tourism & Hospitality Health & Comm.
Queensland	Cooloola Sunshine Coast Institute of TAFE	Maroochydore and Nambour	Business
Queensland	Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE	Townsville	All fields
Queensland	Betaray Training Academy	Ipswich and Gatton	Engineering
Queensland	Moreton Institute of TAFE	Alexandra Hills and Mt Gravatt	Business, Engineering, Tourism & Hospitality
Queensland	Industrial Commercial Employment Training Co.	Brisbane	Engineering
Victoria	Gordon Institute of TAFE	Geelong	Business
Victoria	Victoria University of Technology	Footscray and Sunshine	Engineering
Victoria	University of Ballarat, TAFE Sector	Ballarat	All fields

Appendix 9

Interview schedule for site visits

Director and some associate directors of the institution

1. Why does the college offer these programs in (field of study)?

    a What are the forces which impact on your decisions to run certain courses?

    b Are there internal or external pressures or is there an interplay between the two?

2. Do you run training courses at the request of employers?

    a How does this relationship work?

    b Are your programs run in response to employer needs or do you market your courses to employers?

3. Do you have a mix of on-campus and workplace training offerings?

    a Why do you do it this way?

    b How does this work?

4. Are you experiencing competition from other providers?
What pressures are you experiencing and what is your response to this?

6. Have changes in the training market in terms of user choice, changing clientele and increased competition affected the characteristics and quality of your programs?

    a How have your programs changed?

    b Consider relevance to the client, both employers and students, timing of courses, place of delivery.

7. Do you perceive these are issues experienced by providers of training in general or do you see them as specific to your context? Please explain.

8. How do you market your courses?

Program directors, teachers/trainers

1. Who are the students you have in this course, where do they come from and how do they come to be here?

   Level of education, training background, employment history, current employment.

2. Do you find there is a fit between the individual student and the course they are enrolled in?
   How do you think this has happened?

3. Do you encounter any problems in relation to student choice of course?

4. Have you been engaged in any activities to promote the courses you direct or are qualified to teach, such as approaching schools or employers?

   What are some of these activities?

Students in the course, including some of those surveyed

1. What were you looking for when you enrolled in this course?
   Consider job-related skills, personal fulfillment.

2. Did you have difficulties accessing the course? Describe some of these.

3. Were you certain that this was the course you wanted to take when you enrolled or were you using this course to help you decide what you might do in the future?
   Explain the stages you went through in making the decision to enrol in your course.

4. Have you enrolled in this course because you were unable to get work and further training is better than being unemployed and it may help you get a job in the future?

   Describe some of your experiences in coming to the decision to enrol in your course.

5. Does the course satisfy your needs?
   If not, what are the problems?

6. Where does this training fit in relation to your future work goals?

Student apprentices

1. Why did you choose to take on an apprenticeship?

2. How did you get your apprenticeship?

   a What sort of things did you do to try to get your apprenticeship?

b Consider vocational studies at school, attending TAFE while at school, a pre-vocational course.

3. Does this course help you with your work?
In what ways does it do this?

4. Where will your apprenticeship take you in relation to your future work goals?
Consider own business; stay in the trade; other.

Careers advisers, guidance officers, information officers

1. How do students learn about the services that you provide?

2. What proportion of students make use of your services?

3. What is the split between advice to prospective students and advice to enrolled students?

4. Are most of your interviews face-to-face?
What are the most effective ways of helping students make their choices?

5. How aware are students of the different options available to them?
Do they come with a strong view of what they want to do or are they wanting a lot of guidance?

6. What are your goals when you are giving advice to prospective and enrolled students?

7. Do you find many students have made the 'wrong choice' of course?
Why do you think this happens?

Employers who use the services of the institution

1. How did you find out about your training provider (institution)?

2. What was the influence of their marketing strategies, if any?

3. Why have you chosen (institution) as your training provider?

4. Have you always used this provider or have you had experiences with other training providers?

5. What do you look for in a training provider?
Consider the service offered, customisation of programs, willingness to accommodate employers' needs in course timing, etc.

6. Has (institution) provided the service you hoped for?
If not, what have been the problems?

7. What is your understanding of user choice in the training market?

Appendix 10

Employers interviewed

Type of Employer	Training Provider	Location	State
Motor Vehicle Service	Betaray Training Academy	Capital city	Queensland
Diesel Vehicle Service	Moreton Institute of TAFE	Capital city	Queensland
Metal Fabricating	Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE	Metropolitan	Queensland
Manufacturing	University of Ballarat TAFE Division	Metropolitan	Victoria
Accounting	Gordon Institute of TAFE	Rural	Victoria

Appendix 11

List of participants

NSW	College of Dental Therapy
NSW	Illawarra Institute of Technology
NSW	New England Institute of TAFE
NSW	North Coast Institute of TAFE
NSW	South Western Sydney Institute of TAFE
NSW	Riverina Institute of TAFE
NSW	Southern Sydney Institute of TAFE
NSW	Western Institute of TAFE*
NSW	Western Sydney Institute of TAFE*
NSW	Sydney Institute of Technology*
VIC	Australian Nursing Federation
VIC	Box Hill Institute of TAFE
VIC	Child & Family Care Network
VIC	Gordon Institute of TAFE*
VIC	Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE
VIC	Holmesglen Institute of TAFE
VIC	Swinburne University of Technology
VIC	University of Ballarat TAFE Division*
VIC	Victorian University of Technology*
QLD	Australian College of Natural Medicine
QLD	Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE*
QLD	Betaray Training Academy*
QLD	Bremer Institute of TAFE
QLD	Cooloola Sunshine Coast Institute of TAFE*
QLD	Industry & Commerce Employment & Training Group Inc*
QLD	Moreton Institute of TAFE*
QLD	Queensland Ambulance Service
QLD	Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE
QLD	Tourism College of Australia
QLD	Yeronga Institute of TAFE
SA	Adelaide Institute of TAFE
SA	Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE
SA	Prides Business College
SA	Regency Institute of TAFE
SA	South Australian Health Education Centre Pty Ltd
SA	Spencer Institute of TAFE

WA	Central Metropolitan College of TAFE
WA	Geraldton Regional College of TAFE
WA	Midland College of TAFE
WA	South East Metropolitan College of TAFE
WA	South Metropolitan College of TAFE
WA	South West Regional College of TAFE
WA	Sterling Business College

* Site visits

This research was conducted by the Assessment and Evaluation Research Unit in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Queensland.

Project Director was Dr Graham Maxwell, Senior Lecturer in Education, who has over 30 years experience in educational research in Australia and USA, with particular emphasis on educational assessment, tertiary selection and vocational education. Other members of the research team were Maureen Cooper and Neville Biggs, Senior Research Assistants.

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